



Stephen Collins Foster

A Memoir

By

Harold Vincent Milligan

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# Stephen Collins Foster

A BIOGRAPHY  
*of*  
AMERICA'S FOLK-SONG  
COMPOSER

By  
*Harold Vincent Milligan*



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## PREFACE

The record of scientific and material progress in America has been fairly well established, but in the fine arts we are just beginning to find ourselves, and it is important that the story of our beginnings along these lines should be gathered together and preserved.

Stephen Foster occupies a unique position in the history of music, not only of this country, but of the world. No other single individual produced so many of those songs which are called "folk-songs," by which is meant songs that so perfectly express the mood and spirit of the people that they become a part of the life of all the "folk" and speak as the voice, not of an individual, but of all. So completely do the "folk" absorb these songs and adapt them to their own uses, that the individuality and frequently even the name of the originator is completely lost, thus giving rise to the erroneous idea that a "folk-song" is a song created not by an individual but by a community. It is obvious that all things must have a beginning, however obscure, and every folk-song is first born in the heart and brain of some one person, whose spirit is so finely attuned to the voice of that inward struggle which is the history of the soul of man, that when he seeks for his own self-expression, he at the same time gives a voice to that vast "mute multitude who die and give no sign." Such a one was Stephen Foster, more fortunate in his fate than that glorious company of nameless poet-souls, whose aspiration after "the fair face of Beauty, haunting all the world," is preserved in the folk-songs of the world. Surely his name is worthy of at least one volume upon the shelf of history!

In addition to those names mentioned in the text, I wish gratefully to acknowledge the coöperation of others who contributed in one way or another to the compilation of the material, notably Mrs. Evelyn Foster Morneweck, of Greenville, Penn., Miss Henrietta Crosman, of New York City, Miss Rowena Hermann, of Athens, Penn., and Mr. Robert Garland and Mr. T. Carl Whitmer, both of Pittsburgh. Much valuable information as to dates and other details has been obtained from the Catalog of First Editions, compiled by Mr. Oscar G. Sonneck and Mr. Walter Whittlesey, and published by the Library of Congress.

HAROLD VINCENT MILLIGAN.

New York City, May, 1919.

## I THE FAMILY

It was not a great life, as the world counts greatness. It might even be called a failure, a life sadly out of harmony with its environment. But it has left an indelible impression on the world, and its influence, subtle, indefinite, immaterial but pervasive, is incalculable.

If the philosopher was right who said, "If I may make the songs of a people, I care not who may make the laws," then Stephen Foster's name is worthy of remembrance. Although purists may question their right to the title "folk-songs," his melodies are truly the songs of the American people, while their appeal is so universal that the best of them, "The Old Folks at Home," "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Old Black Joe," are sung the world over.

The day of his birth, July 4th, 1826, was a notable one in the history of the United States. It marked the semi-centennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and great preparations had been made throughout the country to celebrate appropriately the fiftieth birthday of the Republic. While these celebrations were in progress, two of the nation's founders passed away: John Adams, its second President, at Quincy, Mass., and Thomas Jefferson, its third President, at Monticello, Virginia.

Sir George Otto Trevelyan, the English historian of the American Revolution, says, "There have been very famous Fourth of July; one of them, which promised to be gloomy, was brightened by the victory of Gettysburg and the capture of Vicksburg. Another was signalized by the destruction of the Spanish fleet outside the harbor of Santiago. But there is one anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the interest of which cannot be

surpassed. The 4th of July, 1826, was the Jubilee of Independence, and the eyes of all spontaneously turned to the two veterans, so long divided by political differences, more recent indeed than the Revolution, but already of ancient date. It was hoped that they might meet once again, to shake hands over their life's work in the presence of an immense assemblage; some of whom might speak of it in the twentieth century as the most memorable sight an American ever witnessed. But both were very feeble and the hope was abandoned. The great day arrived and the old statesmen, for all they were absent, were not forgotten. From one end of the country to the other, wherever Americans were gathered together, the names of Adams and Jefferson were coupled in accents of gratitude and praise. Party passions were completely drowned in the flood of national feeling which overspread the land. All day Adams was sinking rapidly, and without pain. His last audible remark is said to have been, 'Thomas Jefferson still survives.' But such was not the case. Jefferson died at noon on that Fourth of July, and Adams shortly before sunset. There are few more striking circumstances, and no more remarkable coincidences, in history."

Synchronous with the ending of these two great lives, a third life was just beginning, a life destined also to exercise a powerful, though less tangible influence on the human race.

Colonel William Barclay Foster was one of the leading citizens of the frontier community which centered in the thriving young city of Pittsburgh. His home at Lawrenceville, on the hills above the city, was naturally chosen for the celebration of Independence Day. In the assembled crowd were many veterans of the Revolution, as well as survivors of the War of 1812, and of various conflicts with the Indians; the woods back of the house were the scene of a "barbecue," with band music

and speeches appropriate to the occasion. Just at noon, as the guns were firing the national salute, a son was born in the Foster home, "The White Cottage." This child was named Stephen Collins Foster.

The Foster family was Scotch-Irish, of that remarkable race which has played so important a part in the history of this country and has produced so many leaders in all lines of cultural and material progress, represented in music by Stephen Foster, Edward MacDowell and Ethelbert Nevin.

Alexander Foster, Stephen's great-grandfather, was the first of the family to come to America. He emigrated from Londonderry, Ireland, about the year 1728, and settled in Little Britain Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the birthplace of Robert Fulton. Of his nine children, the eldest, James, married Ann Barclay and removed to Berkeley County, Virginia. It was through this grandmother, Ann Barclay, that Stephen was related to Judge John Rowan of Bardstown, Kentucky, one of that State's first United States Senators, in whose house he is said to have written "My Old Kentucky Home." James Foster, Jr., served in the Continental Army in the War of the Revolution and was at Yorktown when the war was brought to an end by the surrender of Lord Cornwallis. William Foster, the second son of Alexander, became a Presbyterian minister, pastor of the congregations of Octorara and Doe Run. During the Revolution his speeches became so offensive to the British that General Howe sent a troop of horsemen to arrest him, but this attempt to muzzle the "fighting parson" failed, and he lived to a green and highly respected old age.

William Barclay Foster, Stephen's father, was the third son of James Foster, and was born in Berkeley County, Virginia, in 1779. At the close of the war, a number of Scotch-Irish families emigrated from Berkeley County to Western Pennsylvania and settled about

nineteen miles from the present city of Pittsburgh. Among them was James Foster. Of these pioneers in the western wilderness Trevelyan says, "The Scotch-Irish to the west of the Susquehanna resided, isolated and armed, on farms which they themselves had cleared, and they had no defence against a raid of savages except their own vigilance and courage. A fierce and resolute race, they lived not indeed in the fear, but in the contemplation of a probability that their families might be butchered, and the fruits of their labor destroyed in the course of one bloody night."

James Foster became a pillar of the new community, and was one of the founders and original trustees of Dr. McMillan's Canonsburg Academy, founded in 1791, for a school of some kind was one of the first things established by these Scotch-Irish pioneers wherever they formed a new community. The school-house and the Presbyterian church were built practically simultaneously with the dwelling-house and the barn. Thus, while they tamed the wilderness to contribute to their material prosperity, they did not neglect to take thought also for the welfare of both mind and soul. Their sons and daughters were sent to school from rude log-cabins and their studies were accompanied by the sound of the pioneer's ax and rifle. This Canonsburg Academy was the first outpost of learning west of the Alleghany Mountains and afterwards grew into Jefferson College, which in turn became the present Washington-Jefferson College.

William Barclay Foster, the son of James Foster, lived in this new community until he was sixteen, presumably imbibing his intellectual nourishment from Dr. McMillan's Academy. Then he, too, answered the call of his blood, and set out for pastures new.

A new town had been incorporated shortly before that time (1795) at the point where the Alleghany and Monongahela Rivers unite to form the Ohio. There



had been a fort at this spot since the middle of the eighteenth century, the location having been selected by Colonel George Washington as the strategic key to the region. For many years it was little else than a fort and a trading post, but gradually the number of houses clustering around the Blockhouse increased, until in 1786 the town of Pittsburgh was laid out, consisting at that time of thirty-six log houses, one stone and one frame house and five stores. The town sprang into prominence after the conclusion of the French and Indian War, and upon the improvement of the military roads laid out over the Alleghany Mountains during that struggle. Located on the main highway leading to the Mississippi Valley, it was the principal stopping-place in the journey from the East to the Louisiana Country. The trip from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh consumed twenty days and the travel was by pack-horse and wagon. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the population of the city was 1565, increasing in the next ten years to 4768.

Hither came young William Foster, and found employment with Anthony Beelen and Major Ebenezer Denny, then partners in an extensive line of general merchandising peculiar to the frontier trade and the requirements of the new and growing community. According to "The Pittsburgh Gazette" of this date, Denny & Beelen sold "dry goods, hardware, groceries, stationery, perfumery, china, glass and queensware." Ebenezer Denny became Mayor of the city in 1816.

In those days the rivers were the highways of trade, and huge, unwieldy flat-boats were the common carriers. The products of the neighboring country, furs, peltries, whiskey, flour and salt, were loaded on the flat-boats, which were floated down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans, where the goods were sold for cash or exchanged for a return cargo of sugar, coffee and molasses. The Spanish possessions in the West Indies

took the bulk of this river commerce and the business prospered and grew apace.

It was young Foster's duty to accompany these floating caravans down the river, making on the average two trips a year. He would occasionally return overland, by way of Natchez, Nashville, Maysville and Wheeling. For such journeys through this unsettled wilderness, large parties were made up at the starting-point, travelling strongly armed, for the Indians were both hostile and dangerous.

At other times, he would take ship at New Orleans, sailing for New York. These journeys brought him into a danger as thrilling and as terrible as that offered by any marauding band of Indians, for piracy was in those days a fine art, and the voyage led him straight across the heart of the "Spanish Main," where were hidden the lairs of those rapacious and blood-thirsty pirates whose horrible deeds have curdled the blood of successive generations of small boys down to the present day. On one voyage, indeed, the ship was actually captured by pirates off the coast of Cuba, and Foster, with the other passengers, would no doubt have "walked the plank," had not a Spanish man-of-war suddenly appeared in the best dime-novel fashion, causing the pirates to flee for their lives.

In New York and Philadelphia he bought goods for the Pittsburgh store, and accompanied them on their long westward journey. In the earlier years of the business, these shipments were carried over the mountains on the backs of horses. Later, large six-horse wagons of the type known as "Conestoga wagons" were used. The driver sat on one of the horses in the shafts, controlling the others by a check-rein, and on each horse was a string of bells attached to a bow above the collar, "discoursing most eloquent music" as the long line of wagons travelled slowly through the still forests of the mountains.

After the manner of his kind, young Foster applied himself diligently to his business, and in due time was admitted to partnership. On one of these Eastern trips, after he had become a part owner of the business, he met in Philadelphia the young lady who was to become his wife and the mother of Stephen Foster. Her name was Eliza Clayland Tomlinson, and she was a native of Wilmington, Delaware. The Tomlinsons, like the Fosters, were Scotch-Irish, while her maternal ancestors, the Claylands, were English and among the first settlers of the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Both the Claylands and the Tomlinsons fought in the Revolution, Colonel James Clayland particularly distinguishing himself. The family was of the "aristocracy" of the day, and it is from his mother that Stephen derived his poetic temperament.

The young people met while Eliza Tomlinson was visiting her aunt in Philadelphia, Mrs. Oliver Evans, wife of the inventor of the famous "amphibious locomotive." The Evans family lived on Race Street, and Stephen's mother was fond of telling her children in after years how she watched the inventor walk with great pride beside his machine as it moved out of his yard into the street and down into the river.

Of the progress of the love-affair there is no record, but we know that the marriage was solemnized at Chambersburg, November 14th, 1807, by the Rev. David Denny, a Presbyterian minister. William Foster was at that time twenty-eight years old and his bride nineteen. Chambersburg was on the overland route to Pittsburgh, and the newly-married couple set out on horseback over the mountains for their new home. It was a journey of nearly three hundred miles and occupied two weeks. Of the happy ending of this strange honeymoon, the young bride many long years afterward wrote:

The journey was slow and monotonous, and it was not until the fourteenth day that I hailed with delight the dingy town of

Pittsburgh, my future home, where every joy and sorrow of my heart since that bright period have been associated with the joys and sorrows of its people. It was evening, when, weary and faint with travel, I was conducted, or rather borne into the hospitable mansion of my husband's partner, the benevolent Major Denny, a dwelling in the center of the town, where I was received and treated with the most extreme kindness. After resting and changing my apparel I was shown into an apartment below stairs where blazed in all its brilliancy a coal fire, casting its light upon the face of beauty clothed in innocence in the person of little Nancy Denny, at that time five years old. The well-cleaned grating of the chimney-place, the light that blazed brightly from the fire, the vermillion hearth, the plain rich furniture, the polished stand with lighted candles in candlesticks resembling burnished gold, made an evening scene that fell gratefully on my pleased sight. Upon a sofa lay the tall and military figure of the Major, a gentleman of the old school, easy and dignified in his bearing, a soldier who had served his country well under Washington at Yorktown, and Harmar, St. Clair and Wayne in the subsequent Indian campaigns.

Pittsburgh at this time was a city not without some pretensions as the young metropolis of the far West. Hither, after the close of the Revolutionary War, had come many officers of the Continental Army with their families, bringing with them the courtesies and social amenities of the seaboard colonies, but lately become states. An early chronicler of the city's history remarks with pride that a number of the families had their own carriages and drove through town attended by liveried servants. When Louis Philippe and his brothers, Beaujolais and Montpensier, visited Pittsburgh, they expressed their surprise and pleasure at the "ease and elegance" of their entertainment in the border town.

In this ambitious western frontier town, William Foster and his wife made their home until their death, and here their children were born. According to the record of the old family Bible, still preserved, ten children were born to them, of whom two died in infancy. Stephen was the ninth child, and as his little brother James, born three years later, died at the age of one year, Stephen was always "the baby of the family." And a most interesting and delightful family it was, too, as is shown by such of the family letters as have been preserved. The last surviving member of that generation,

Morrison Foster, left a collection of letters which had passed between parents and children and brothers and sisters. These letters give an insight not only into the existence of those days, but also reveal the charm of a beautiful and affectionate family life. From these letters, some of them dating as far back as 1812, much of the information contained in the following pages has been obtained and to them frequent reference will be made.

That William Foster prospered and laid up for himself treasures of this world's goods, there is ample evidence. That he was a man of great public spirit is revealed not only in his own letters, but also in his deeds. During the War of 1812 he was appointed Quartermaster and Commissary of the United States Army. When the Army of the Northwest appealed to the government for supplies to enable them to continue the war, the answer was "a mournful echo from the vaults of an exhausted treasury"; but William Foster, with his own money and upon his own personal credit, procured the necessary supplies. When the British army, which had captured Washington and burned the Capitol, turned their fleet southward for the capture of New Orleans, urgent orders came to Pittsburgh to send forward clothing, blankets, guns and ammunition for the relief of Jackson's army. Again William Foster drew upon his own fortune and credit to procure the needed supplies. He loaded the steamboat "Enterprise," the fourth steamboat to turn a wheel on the western river, and the first to make the trip to New Orleans and return, and dispatched her from Pittsburgh on the 15th of December, 1814. She was commanded by one of the pioneer river captains, Henry M. Shreve. Leaving Pittsburgh just at twilight on a winter afternoon, as the boat rounded to and pointed down stream for the long voyage, Capt. Shreve called out to Foster, standing on the wharf, "I'll get her there before the British or sink this boat."

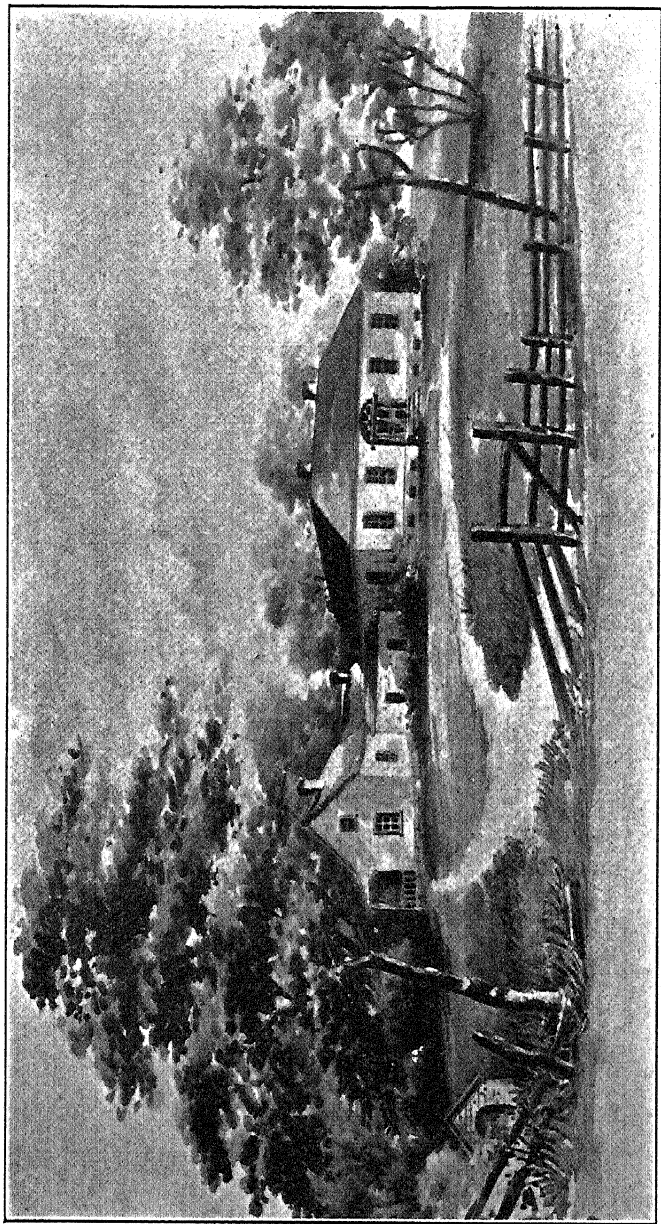
Part of the journey was accomplished through floating ice, but New Orleans was reached on the 5th of January, 1815, three days before the battle which saved Louisiana. Captain Shreve unloaded part of his cargo at the city and ran down the river to Fort Philip, passing the British batteries, returned again to the city and took part in the battle of the 8th of January, serving in one of the American batteries. Captain Shreve and the steamer "Enterprise" later made the trip from New Orleans to Louisville in twenty-five days, which was considered so remarkable a feat that the worthy Captain was publicly fêted by the latter city.

During this troublesome time, the government was often indebted to William Foster for as much as \$50,000. Upon the final adjudication of his accounts, it became necessary to refer the facts as to certain amounts to a jury. Upon the hearing of the case in the United States Court at Pittsburgh in 1823, the venerable Judge Walker, in his charge to the jury, paid this tribute to the patriot: "Terminate as this cause may, Mr. Foster has established for himself a character for zeal, patriotism, generosity and fidelity which cannot be forgotten, and has placed a laurel on his brow that will never fade."

A verdict in his favor was returned by the jury without leaving the court-room, but the judgment was never settled and still stands unpaid on the records of the United States Court at Pittsburgh.

His fortune at this time must have been considerable, for, in spite of these difficulties and responsibilities, on April 5th, 1814, he paid \$35,000 for a tract of 171 acres on a hillside overlooking the Alleghany River about two miles above the city of Pittsburgh. The history of this land is to be found in the County records at Pittsburgh. It was originally patented by the State to one Conrad Winebiddle, December 27th, 1787, under the tract title "Good Liquor." It was part of George Croghan's vast holdings and not far from the site of Croghan's Castle,





The Foster Homestead



burned by the Indians during the siege of Fort Pitt, in 1763.

The tract purchased by William Foster was known as "Bullitt's Hill," and extended on the north as far as the Alleghany River, including the ground where Colonel George Washington and his guide, Christopher Gist, landed on December 28th, 1753, after being marooned all night on Wainright's Island and nearly frozen to death while returning from the French Fort Venango. It was doubtless farmland when Foster bought it and, as the consideration indicates, was accounted valuable, with a water-front and two main travelled roads intersecting it and leading into the town of Pittsburgh.

Immediately after purchasing the land, William Foster donated a part of it to be, as he expressed it, "a burial ground for our soldiers forever," where they might be buried by right and not by sufferance. At the time this donation was made, soldiers were passing through Pittsburgh continually, going to or returning from the war. Many of them died there and were buried in the Potter's Field. As the son of an American soldier, Foster determined that this shameful practice should no longer continue. The burial-ground he thus donated is marked at the present time by a monument of solid granite, bearing the inscription, "In honor of the American soldiers who lie buried here," with the date 1814. In the same year he also sold thirty acres of the land to the Government, and upon it was erected the Arsenal which was in use until 1905. Upon a spot well up on the hill, overlooking the river, he erected "The White Cottage," which became the Foster homestead, and here the younger Foster children, including Stephen, were born. The remainder of his land Foster laid out as a town and named it Lawrenceville, after that Captain Lawrence whose death in a naval battle, occurring shortly before this time, was immortalized by his dying words, "Don't give up the ship!"

When the family moved to Lawrenceville, there were three children, Charlotte, aged five, Ann Eliza, aged three, and William Barclay junior, two or three months old. Upon him, as the eldest son, fell much burden and responsibility in after years. His mother idolized him, calling herself "the proud mother of the best of sons"; he was his father's intimate as well as business partner and advisor, and to him little Stephen looked up as to a father.

The family Bible, with laconic brevity, chronicles the arrival at the White Cottage of other little Fosters—Henry in 1816, Henrietta in 1818, Dunning in 1821 and Morrison in 1823. With all of these young people we shall become better acquainted later.

## II

# BOYHOOD

Oddly enough, the first reference to Stephen in these family letters pictures him at the age of six absorbed in musical activities. It occurs in a letter written by his mother to his eldest brother, William.

Harmony, May the 14, 1832.

My dear Son,—

I have already written one letter to Ann Eliza, the only time that I have had a pen in hand, that I can recollect, for two years or more. Besides the very many perplexities of house-keeping, there was the weak and tremulous state I was left in after the death of your ever to be lamented sister Charlotte and equally interesting little brother James. My body has only recovered strength since my mind was restored to that tranquility which comes only from a perfect reconciliation to the will of that Omniscient Power which regulates and rules. Although the vessels are broken which I hewed out to hold the sources of my earthly joys, the delightful cottage and the sound of the deep-toned instrument still comes dancing on in the arrear of memory, with pain and sorrow at thought of how it closed forever with the departure from this transitory stage of her we loved so dearly. But now I have little to ask, all is well that God in His mercy sends me. I lead a quiet life, you are getting along, Ann Eliza is in Meadville, and content, Henry likes the manual training institution. Your Father is in Pittsburgh and the little children go to school with quite as happy faces as though the world had no thorns in it, and I confess there would be but few if we would all follow the Scriptures, in which we would be made strong. Write to me soon and I will try to answer it.

Your affectionate mother,

ELIZA C. FOSTER.

I thought the mail would not close until I could finish my letter, but being late I concluded rather hastily without saying anything about Stephen, who has a drum and marches about after the old way, with a feather in his hat and a girdle round his waist, whistling "Auld Lang Syne." He often asks why you don't come home. There still remains something perfectly original about him. Dunning has written several letters to you and he does not know but that they are worthy of being answered; however, he drives on. He means to write another soon. We should like to hear from you, as Pa may receive letters in Pittsburgh without our knowing how you do out here. That we may be all together again when it pleaseth God, the unseen influence that directs our ways, is the sincere prayer of one who proudly claims the name of Mother to the best of sons.

William B. Foster, Junior, to whom this letter was written, had left home in 1826, the year of Stephen's

birth, when he himself was only seventeen years old. In the spring of that year a party of engineers, engaged in locating the route of a proposed canal from Pittsburgh to Kiskiminetas, passed through Lawrenceville, and stopped for dinner at the Foster home. As they were in need of more men for the work they had undertaken, the head of the family suggested that they take with them his oldest son.

This was the beginning of a long and highly successful career. William B. Foster, Junior, soon became a full-fledged "civil engineer," and from that time on was prominent in all that region for his work in various lines. He spent several years in Kentucky, working on improvements in the Green River country, and on his return to Pennsylvania became Chief Engineer of Public Works of the State, including canals and railroads. Although his work kept him away from home, his loving care for his father and mother and the younger members of the family seems never to have lessened.

In the summer of 1847 he was appointed one of the two Chief Engineers of the proposed "Pennsylvania Railroad," to connect the Western country with Philadelphia, and in this capacity he laid out and built a large part of the road west of Harrisburg, including the difficult crossing of the Alleghany Mountains. At the time of his death in 1860 he was First Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

The death of Charlotte, the oldest daughter of the family, mentioned in this letter, had occurred two and a half years earlier, in October, 1829, while she was visiting relatives in Louisville. The shock of this tragic event seems to have had a profound effect upon all the older members of the family.

Charlotte, as revealed by her letters, was a girl of much animation and charm. She was nineteen years old, engaged to be married, and seems to have possessed a bright, merry spirit and much social grace. Her letters

describing her trip to Louisville and her visit there are full of gayety and sparkle: "I fear, my dear Father, you will think this a very frivolous letter," concludes one of them after several pages devoted to parties and social gossip.

The death of Charlotte left Ann Eliza the oldest child. She was twenty when the letter, quoted above, was written. Later she married the Rev. Edward Y. Buchanan, a brother of President Buchanan, and lived to be nearly eighty years of age.

The younger children, who were at this time going to school "with such happy faces," were Dunning, aged eleven, Morrison, nine, and Stephen, five. Stephen's first experience with school had occurred shortly before this at an "infant school" conducted by a Mrs. Harvey, an elderly lady, and her daughter, Mrs. Morgan. The incident is described by his brother Morrison, who tells how Stephen was called up for his first lesson in the letters of the alphabet, and had not proceeded far in this mystery when his patience gave out, and "with a yell like that of a Comanche Indian, he bounded bareheaded into the road and never stopped running and yelling until he reached home, a mile away."

In the following year, a letter to William from his mother, dated "Pittsburgh, July 9, 1833," describes a long trip by river steamer which she took with Henrietta (aged fourteen) and Stephen. Later in the same year Henrietta in a letter to William speaks of Stephen:

We are all well, except Ma, . . . and little Stephy had his eye bitten by a spider and it was very much swollen indeed, but he is getting well too.

About this time, the three younger boys were attending a school founded by the Rev. Joseph Stockton, an old friend of the Foster family, who had come from Meadville to "Alleghany Town," across the river from Pittsburgh. He was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Alleghany as well as Principal of the Alleghany

Academy. This academy was considered a model institution for the education of youth, and was attended by the sons of nearly all the most prominent citizens of Pittsburgh and Alleghany.

Mr. Stockton was regarded as a very learned man. In addition to his high repute as a classical scholar, he had also achieved fame as the author of a book on arithmetic which was for a long time the standard in schools west of the Alleghany Mountains. His chief assistant in the Alleghany Academy was one John Kelly, an Irishman who had been tutor in the family of Sir Rowland Hill, and who had brought with him to Pittsburgh letters of introduction from many of "the most excellent people in the refined city of Dublin." Mr. Kelly was held to be a rigid disciplinarian, but notwithstanding "of genial disposition." Out of school he played ball and prisoner's base with the boys and "excelled in every manly athletic exercise," but in school he required strict attention to business. The faculty boasted two other members, who were entrusted with the instruction of elocution and penmanship.

Lindley Murray was the standard authority on grammar, and "The English Reader," by the same author, was used for instruction in reading. Hutton's Mathematics and "The Western Calculator" were relied on for arithmetic, together with Mr. Stockton's book.

Stephen's copy of "Walker's Dictionary" is one of the very few of his possessions which have been preserved. It is now in a very dilapidated condition; the front cover, the title-pages and the last pages from the letter "Z," are missing.

These books constituted the chief sources of primary education for the youth of Western Pennsylvania in the 1830's, while "the higher walks of learning" were followed at Jefferson College at Canonsburg (which had grown out of Dr. McMillan's Academy), Washington College at Washington, and the Western University at Pittsburgh.

Stephen seems to have conquered his first aversion to disciplined instruction, but he was not the type of child to make a teacher's heart throb with joy. The fact that there still remained about him "something perfectly original," was enough to make his school-days a time of trial and tribulation. These school troubles, however, developed later. In the beginning he seems to have been more docile, for his father wrote to brother William from Pittsburgh, July 14th, 1834, "Little Stephen is learning very fast. Mr. Kelly says that he and Morrison are the most sensible children he ever saw in his life."

Later in the same letter occurs this interesting remark:

Mrs. Collins made your Ma a present of an excellent colored girl a few days ago, who has upwards of three years of service, so much saved for girl's hire.

This Mrs. Collins was probably Mrs. Thomas Collins, wife of a prominent Pittsburgh lawyer. She and Mrs. Foster were close friends, and Stephen was named for her only son, who had died at the age of twelve years, just before Stephen's birth. The girl was Olivia Pise, a mulatto, the illegitimate daughter of a West Indian Frenchman who taught dancing to the upper circles of Pittsburgh society early in the last century. "Lieve," as she was called, was very devout and a member of a church of shouting colored people. She was sometimes permitted to take "little Stephy" to church with her, and the singing of the colored people must have made a deep impression on the mind of the sensitive child. To these experiences he doubtless owes much of the spontaneity and fidelity to type of his negro melodies, many of which are so thoroughly and essentially characteristic as to give rise to the erroneous idea that they are not original, but actual folk-melodies of the colored people.

In 1836, Mrs. Foster went "over the mountains" for a long visit with her relatives. There are several letters from her to William, full of loving confidence in his tact and judgment. From Philadelphia she wrote in May:

Tell Morrison and Stephen I know they are good boys and look up to their kind elder brother for countenance and protection, with submission.

In this same year, 1836, the family left the White Cottage and moved to Alleghany City, across the river, where Stephen spent a large part of the remainder of his life. This move was due to the fact that William B. Foster, Senior, had been appointed the first Collector of the Pennsylvania Canal, which had just been completed, an appointment which came to him as a reward for his ardent support, both in and out of the Legislature, of the plan to build the canal.

All told, he served three terms in the State Legislature. To attend a session meant a journey of six days on horseback over the mountains to Harrisburg. Many of his letters from Harrisburg are in the Morrison Foster collection, and while they possess much that is of interest and historical value, they have no direct bearing upon Stephen's life, so they are not here reproduced.

The White Cottage and much of the land on Bullitt's Hill was sold and the family became identified with the life of the city across the river. William B. Foster was twice elected Mayor of Alleghany. His family lived for many years in a house on the corner of Union Avenue and Gay Alley, facing the Common, a grass-grown, uncultivated open stretch of country upon which cows grazed.

The first letter in Stephen's own handwriting was written to his father from Youngstown, Ohio, whither he had gone "a-visiting" in the winter of 1837, when he was ten years old. This, the first autograph of a famous man, is just a message from a homesick little boy, who had great difficulty in forming his letters, which in spite of the best he could do, *would* run up-hill and down—a fact which evidently annoyed him considerably.

Youngstown, January 14th, 1837.

My dear Father:

I wish you to send me a commic songster for you promised to. If I had my pensyl I could rule my paper or if I had the money to



buy black ink but if I had my whistle I would be so taken with it I do not think I would write a tall, there has been a sleighing party this morning with twenty or thirty cupples Dr. Bane got home last night and told us Henry was coming out here. I wish Dunning would come with him. Tell them both to try to come for I should like to see them both most two much to talk about.  
I remane your loving son,

STEPHEN C. FOSTER

A letter from "Mother," written in June of the same year, records that "Stephen has recovered from the whooping cough and is going to school with Morrison to Mr. Todd."

This Mr. Todd, like Mr. Stockton and most of the educators of that time and region, was a Presbyterian minister. His instruction laid special emphasis upon Latin and Greek, and he is reported to have referred to Stephen as "the most perfect gentleman he ever had for a pupil."

"Little Stephy's" musical talents had been in evidence before this time. There is a family tradition that, at the age of two, he would lay his sister's guitar, which he called his "ittle pizano" (little piano) on the floor and pick out harmonies on it. There may be some truth in this pretty legend as far as the guitar is concerned, but it is extremely doubtful if "Little Stephy" at the age of two, had ever seen or heard a piano. It was not until twenty years later that the first "upright" piano was brought across the mountains to Pittsburgh, and "grand" pianos were certainly not familiar objects there in 1828. At any rate, we know that the Foster family did not possess one at that time. Possibly the guitar was "the deep-toned instrument" mentioned in the letter at the beginning of this chapter in connection with the death of Charlotte.

There is also a story of Stephen's accompanying his mother on a shopping trip at the age of seven, and while in the music store of Smith & Mellor, in Pittsburgh, picking up a flageolet off the counter, and in a few minutes, unaided and indeed unobserved, so mastering

the technic of the instrument as to be able to render intelligibly to the amazed ears of the clerks and other shoppers the strains of "Hail Columbia."

According to another of these family traditions, he appeared at the age of nine as the star performer of an amateur "Thespian Society" composed of neighborhood boys. The theatre was fitted up in a carriage house, and all the boys were stock-holders except Stephen, who was much the youngest member of the society and was at first admitted merely on sufferance. He was too small to attain much prominence as a "Thespian," but at the performances of the club he sang the popular songs of the day with so much grace and charm that he soon came to be regarded as the bright particular star of the entire constellation. So great was his popularity that the other members guaranteed him a certain sum per week in order to retain his services and good will. It was a very small sum, but sufficient to mark his superiority over the rest of the company.

The negro song had just come into vogue and the popular ditties were "Zip Coon," "Longtail Blue," "Coal Black Rose" and "Jim Crow." Stephen's performance of these songs was greeted with uproarious applause, whenever the company gave an entertainment before their admiring friends and families, which was, during its brief existence, three times a week. When sufficiently large the proceeds from these performances were used to buy the amateur Thespians tickets to the old Pittsburgh Theatre on Saturday nights, where they enjoyed the acting of Junius Brutus Booth, Edwin Forrest, and other celebrities of the time.

Between the ages of ten and thirteen, Stephen frequently visited an old uncle, John Struthers, who lived in Youngstown, Ohio, which was still considered "frontier." Uncle Struthers had been a surveyor, hunter and Indian fighter in the early settlement of the country; and now, in his eighties, he was very fond of Stephen and

welcomed him to his log house in the Northwest Territory. He had dogs and rifles and would lead the hunt at night for 'coons, 'possums, and other nocturnal game. This may have been tame work to the old pioneer, who had been used to bears, panthers and hostile Indians, but these hunts and the stories of adventure told him by his aged relative must have been a source of great delight to the imaginative child. Old Uncle Struthers, who seems to have been a bit of a character himself, responded to the "something perfectly original" in Stephen, and prophesied that if he lived to be a man he would turn out "something famous," although he did not specify just what outlet Stephen's originality would seek.

One of these visits took place in the summer of 1839, when Stephen was thirteen, for Henrietta writes to William,

Youngstown, Sept. 29, 1839

. . . . Stephen enjoys himself finely at Uncle Struther's. He never appears to have the least inclination to leave there and don't seem to feel at all lonely. Uncle just lets him do as he pleases with the horses and cattle, which makes him the greatest man on the grounds.

Earlier in the same year, William had visited the family, and had proposed that he take Stephen back with him on his return to Towanda, in Bradford County, where his headquarters were established at that time. He agreed to put the boy in school at Athens, a near-by town, where there was a good academy and where he could be under the watchful care of his loving big brother. His parents' consent having been gained, the plan was adopted, and another chapter of Stephen's educational adventures was begun. It was winter, and William took him all the way to Towanda in his own sleigh, drawn by two horses. The distance was over three hundred miles, but the sleighing was good and William Foster was a man of great personal popularity who had many friends and acquaintances along the road.

To Stephen the journey was a joyous adventure, and remained with him all his life as a beautiful memory to which he often referred with delight.

The Athens Academy was one of the best schools of its kind in that region. Its history, like that of many other of these pioneer schools, shows the high regard in which "learning" was held by the founders and builders of the frontier communities. The first move to found an Academy at "Tioga Point" (as it was then known) was made in February, 1797. About \$900 was subscribed in shares of \$30 each by the citizens of the neighborhood. The country was new and sparsely settled, money was scarce, and many of the shares were paid in labor and materials. The frame of the building was erected, but stood for several years without being enclosed. Later, a small appropriation was obtained from the Legislature and the second story of the building was rented to the Masonic Lodge and occupied by them for several years. In these and various other ways the school fund was raised, and finally on Monday, April 25th, 1814, just seventeen years after the first subscription had been made, the school was opened. During the next thirty years, the Academy had no less than twenty Principals, probably more, for the records were negligently kept. Some of these "Principals" held the position only three or four weeks, or a few months, only two of them enduring through a period of three years each.

The building was painted white, and an architectural feature held worthy of note by local historians was the fact that it had "four handsomely turned (round) pillars to support the front and a bell-tower over the porch." In 1841 the school received from the State an income of \$500 a year, the first payment of which was spent for "astronomical and philosophical apparatus and books for the library."

At the time Stephen Foster was a pupil, the Athens Academy was enjoying "the most brilliant period in its

entire history," under the administration of John G. Marvin. "His education was somewhat defective," runs a chronicle, "so much so that he needed to study ahead of his more advanced classes," but he was "an unusually fine disciplinarian." In the Spring of 1841, the Academy published a catalogue of trustees, teachers and students, for the year ending July, 1841, recording the presence of two hundred students, "males 130, females 70." In this catalogue occurs the name of "Stephen Collins Foster of Pittsburgh."

Of Stephen's schoolmates at the Athens Academy, probably none survive to this day. There are to be found, however, a few reminiscences of him that help us to a clear picture of his boyhood. One of the memories which endured through the years was that of the tones of Stephen's flute, floating over the water to the boating parties on the river.

The following description of Stephen at this age was written for the Bradford County Historical Society nearly seventy years later by R. M. Welles:

It was in January, 1841, that I met Stephen C. Foster at school in Athens. It may be of interest to the reader to have a description of this remarkable musical and poetical writer as I recollect him. He was at the time in his fifteenth year; his complexion was rather dark, he had a tall large head, which was covered with fine, nearly black hair, that lay flat upon the scalp, and if I recollect correctly his jaws were somewhat square, indicating firmness. This quality was shown in his intense application to study and composition. He was studious and according to my recollection, kept much to his room and did not join the boys in their sports. I do not remember that he spent any time in society. He was rather delicate in health, mainly I think because of lack of physical exercise, and later in life was somewhat nervous, not being able to sleep at night except in perfect quiet. Stephen was studious and did not join with the other boys in their sports. He was a good penman and made fine ornamental letters.

Another recollection of Stephen was written in 1897, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the school, by John A. Perkins of Fresno, California:

Stephen C. Foster, of minstrel fame, was at the Academy about this time, and showed some of the genius he displayed in later years.

I can see him speaking "Lord Ullin's Daughter" as though it was yesterday; at the close he would fold his arms, throw back his head and tragically exclaim, "My daughter, oh my daughter!"

One of Stephen's friends at Athens was William Wallace Kingsbury, who afterwards became the first United States Senator from Minnesota. Among his reminiscences is this reference to Stephen:

Well do I remember the inimitable Stephen C. Foster. He was my special friend and companion. Being a year older than myself and considerably larger, he used to defend me in my boyhood antagonisms with belligerent schoolmates. We often played truant together, rambling by shady streams or gathering wild strawberries in the meadows or pastures far removed from the old Academy bell. Our mutual luxury, in which we jointly indulged in those excursions without leave, was in going barefoot and wading in pools of running water that meandered through Mercer's farm and down Mix's Run in the village of my nativity. Foster wore a fine quality of hose, and I remember how it shocked me to see him cast them away when soiled by perspiration or muddy water. His was a nature generous to a fault, with a soul attuned to harmony. His love of music was an all-absorbing passion and his execution on the flute was the very genius of melody and gave rise to those flights of inspired pathos which have charmed the English-speaking world with their excellence from cabin to palace.

There is a reference to Stephen in a letter to William from his father, dated Pittsburgh, April 27th, 1840:

Dear William;

I wrote to Stephen on the 18th and scolded him pretty smartly for not having written to us more frequently, but he is not quite so much to blame as I then thought, for in the evening of that day I received a letter from him which was dated the 27th of March, and must have been twenty-one days on the way. I wish you to tell him of this.

Up to this time there is no reference in any of the family archives to Stephen's taste for music. The legends about his sister's guitar and the flageolet in Smith & Mellor's Music Store were remembered long afterwards, when his life had taken definite form and direction. At some time in his childhood he learned to play upon the flute, an accomplishment which helped him to win an unfortunate social popularity later in life. His flute is one of the objects now on view in the pathetically small museum of Fosterana at the Foster Homestead Memorial in Pittsburgh. In some manner also he learned

to play the piano, although how or from whom the record does not state. He is supposed to have had some lessons from Henry Kleber, one of the few professional musicians of Pittsburgh of that day, and Morrison Foster mentions W. C. Peters, who published the first of Stephen Foster's songs, as "a former music teacher in our family."

### III

## YOUTH

Whatever Stephen's early musical training may have been, his talent had already asserted itself, for at this time publicity was first given to an effort at musical composition. This was a "Tioga Waltz," written for the extraordinary combination of four (or possibly three) flutes! According to Morrison Foster, it was performed by Stephen and three other students at the Commencement exercises of the Athens Academy in 1839. It is recorded that the piece was received with evident delight by the audience and was rewarded with "much applause and an encore." It was never published during Stephen's lifetime, but is included in the volume of collected songs and compositions issued by Morrison Foster in 1896, with the statement: "It has never previously been published, and is only now reproduced from my memory, where it has lain for fifty years."

In itself, of course, it is not a remarkable composition, but it is highly creditable to the ambition and originality of a thirteen-year-old boy, in so unfavorable an environment, that he should have attempted anything at all in the way of musical self-expression. It consists of eight phrases, each eight bars in length and each repeated with a "second ending." It is in the key of C, without modulation; the harmony is alternation of tonic and dominant-seventh, with just one appearance of the subdominant. Stephen "took the leading part," and must have been fairly efficient as a flutist to play the melody. It also argues some degree of musical knowledge and skill that he was able to set down his ideas in musical notation.

R. M. Welles, one of Stephen's schoolmates, gives a slightly different version of the first performance of the "Tioga Waltz," placing it two years later:

An exhibition was to be held by the school in the old Presbyterian Church, April 1st, 1841—at that time the only house of worship in



Athens. Stephen C. Foster composed and wrote his first piece of music, I think, expressly for the exhibition, and with James H. Forbes and William F. Warner, the three practiced the piece, which Stephen named "Tioga Waltz" and played it upon the stage with their flutes—not "four flutes," as stated by his brother, Morrison Foster.

Robert P. Nevin says that the song "Sadly to My Heart Appealing" was written during this same year, but Morrison Foster makes no mention of it. Published nearly twenty years later by Firth, Pond & Co., after its composer had become famous, it is one of the crudest of Foster's songs and, quite conceivably, might have been the work of a thirteen-year-old boy. It contains a little more harmonic material than the "Tioga Waltz," but in spite of this fact it is both repetitious and dull. The words are so badly welded to the music as to arouse the suspicion that they may not have been the original inspiration of the melody. In the day of his fame, when everything he wrote found a ready market, Stephen may have resurrected this old, childish tune and adapted it to verses for which it was only partially suited. The published song, copyrighted in 1858, ascribes the words to Eliza Sheridan Carey, as "Lines suggested on listening to an old Scottish melody."

The "poetry" of that time was saturated with gloom, and these depressing verses may have appealed to Stephen's youthful fancy or he may have selected them in later years. His own literary ability, as evidenced by the lyrics with which he provided himself for more than a hundred songs, was distinctly above that of the author of "Sadly to My Heart Appealing," which offends not only against good taste, but also against English grammar.

Sadly to my heart appealing,  
Sadly, sadly, well-a-day,  
Requiem-like in murmurs stealing,  
Comes that old familiar lay;

Wherefore not the wonted pleasure  
From the antique music spring?  
Why that well-remembered measure  
Grieving thoughts and anguish bring?

Even at the age of thirteen, Stephen could probably have done better than this. The fourth verse is especially doleful:

Ghost-like thus they wane before me,  
Quenched their lustre, fled their bloom,  
While pale mem'ry, tearful, o'er me  
Flings the shadow of the tomb.

There is nothing characteristically Scotch about the music except that the composer, consciously or unconsciously, incorporated in the eight-bar prelude the refrain of the song "Robin Adair."

The "applause and encore" which greeted the "Tioga Waltz" do not seem to have encouraged the youthful composer to any further productions, for aside from "Sadly to My Heart Appealing," there is no hint of any other musical compositions during the ensuing period of three years. He was still interested in music, however, for his name appears on the roster of the Towanda Band, in which he played the clarinet.

The summer following the commencement made memorable by the performance of the "Tioga Waltz," he was with Uncle Struthers, returning to Athens in the fall and spending the winter in school there.

A letter from his mother to William, written from Youngstown in the following summer (1840), indicates that he was still under the protection of his oldest brother. It also suggests that his future career had been the subject of some discussion in the family.

Youngstown, August 7th, 1840.

. . . . As to Stephen, I leave everything regarding the future to your own judgment, West Point or the navy I have no choice; you are not only his brother, but his Father; and I trust all his feelings will ascend to you as his patron.

. . . . Give much love to my dear boy Stephen and endeavor to realize a full share of the anxious solicitude for your welfare and happiness existing in the breast of your affectionate

MOTHER.

Stephen evidently returned home to his mother, for there is another reference to him in a letter written about two months later:

Alleghany town, Oct. 18th, 1840.

. . . . Stephen and I have the house to ourselves and lonely enough it is. So much so that it has induced a very pretty tortoiseshell cat to take up her boarding and lodging with us. Business is rather dull for her in this establishment, therefore she lies about the fire, taking possession of the middle of the hearth-rug; she will not be looked upon as a loafer until she gets her beautiful hair singed. Notwithstanding there is no mice in the premises, she looks sleek and nice, for Stephen gives her all the little bits he is permitted to gather together for the sake of her company, to the great robbing of Emeline, a half-grown girl who, he has taken it into his head, shall never suffer herself to look at him, no matter how you fix it. He is not so much devoted to music as he was; other studies seem to be elevated in his opinion; he reads a great deal and fools about none at all.

This last sentence shows that the "Tioga Waltz" of the year before was not the extent of his musical activity, but we do not know just what form his devotion to music took, nor how great was the eclipse through which it was then passing.

It must have been reassuring to his parents to note that, in spite of his "weakness" for music, he "fools about none at all." His visit at home did not last long, as he is back in Athens three weeks later. He writes from there to his brother on November 9th, 1840:

Dear Brother:

As Mr. Mitchell is going to start for Towanda to-day I thought I would write you a line concerning my studies, as he says you will not be back for more than a week.

My Philosophy, Grammar and Arithmetic not being enough to keep me going, I would ask your permission to study either Latin or Bookkeeping.

I have no place to study in the evenings as the little ones at Mr. Herrick's keep such a crying and talking that its impossible to read. There is a good fire-place in my room and if you will just say the word, I will have a fire in it at nights and learn something. When you come, don't forget my waistcoat at the tailors, there are several little articles which I need though I have no room to mention them. I must stop writing as I am very cold.

Your affectionate brother,

STEPHEN.

The family archives do not state whether the waistcoat arrived safely or whether the young student was allowed a fire in his own room by which to study, but however that may be, he finished the year in the school

at Athens. There is a reference to him in a letter from his mother to William:

Pittsburgh, March 24, 1841.

. . . . Poor little Stephen, how is he? I think of him very much of late.

In his biography of his brother, Morrison Foster states that Stephen stayed only about a year in school at Athens, but the extracts from letters quoted above and the presence of his name in the Academy catalogue of 1841, prove that he spent at least two and a half years there. This is of some importance, as it indicates that his general education was more systematic and thorough than is sometimes stated.

The year after Stephen left the Athens Academy, the building was destroyed by fire. It was on a Saturday afternoon in March. Some of the boys had been amusing themselves by jumping on and off the cakes of ice floating in the river, and on returning to the school, they built a roaring fire to dry their wet clothes. The wood work surrounding the bottom of the chimney took fire and the whole building was burned, including the library, minerals, and the "astronomical and philosophical apparatus" purchased with the money appropriated by the State.

Stephen left Athens at the end of the school term in the early summer of this year (1841) and after a brief visit with his parents in Alleghany went to Canonsburg, where he entered Jefferson College. He was not happy there and did not stay long, and this episode marks the end of his regular schooling. He seems to have been restless and to have been groping about in the effort to find himself. If at this time he could have come under the influence of a personality in sympathy with his own and could have received, even in small degree, the right kind of companionship and advice, his whole life and his place in musical history would probably have been immeasurably enhanced. While he had made only a

few childish efforts at composition, and had not yet begun his career as a song-writer, this period is obviously the turning-point of his life. He was fifteen years old, restless and dissatisfied with school, but of too energetic and original a temperament to drift aimlessly. The urge toward music and an artistic life was so strong as to prevent him from following any other course, and yet there seems to have been not a single ray of light to point out to him the way of his own salvation. Such music as he came in contact with was of so inferior a quality and so associated with idleness and dissipation as to be regarded at best only as an amiable weakness; the idea that music offered an opportunity for serious study and development, or promised a career of possible worth and dignity, probably never entered his head or anyone else's.

For a few years this period of unsuccessful striving to adjust himself to his environment continued, but by the time he had found his real vocation and had begun his career as a song-writer, the unfortunate weaknesses of his character had crystalized and developed beyond his control and he was never again able to direct or guide his destiny. The unrealized aspirations of his youth had left him only a sense of failure and of longing unfulfilled; he never really found himself and the motive power of ambition and self-respect left him, never to return. He drifted along, the victim of emotions too strong and will-power too weak to make his life effective.

He entered college cheerfully and hopefully enough. He wrote to William from Canonsburg, July 24th, 1841:

My dear Brother,

I arrived here on last Tuesday and found among the quantity of students at this institution several of my old acquaintances.

This is a very pretty situation where I board, as it is on an elevation of about four hundred feet. We have about 230 written (enrolled) students here at the present time and a library of about 1500 volumes.

Pa paid my tuition bill in advance as it is customary at this place. There are several other bills which I have not paid as I have not the means, such as \$2 or \$3 for joining one of the literary societies; as all of the students belong to them, I was requested to join one and

put it off for a couple of weeks, as Pa had not much more than the means of getting along. I thought I would write you this letter that you might consider over the matter. I will also have to pay a boarding bill at the end of every month, which will amount to \$8.50, that is at the end of four weeks and a half, which generally makes a month, and if you see fit to send me a little of the [*word illegible*] once in a while I will insure you there is no inducements here to make me spend my money unnecessarily. I will also have to pay about \$1.25 per week for washing as I have to keep myself very clean here.

I would inform you in the meantime I need another summer coat or two, especially for Sunday.

The Ohio river is very low and falling gradually. The boats have ceased running.

As I have made out a middling long letter and am clear out of information (news) I would only say, wishing you a safe journey home and through life and that I may some day be fit to render thanks to you for your unceasing kindness to me, I remain your ever grateful and affectionate brother.

STEPHEN.

These noble and worthy sentiments did not serve to keep him in college for very long, as three weeks later his mother writes to William:

Pittsburgh, August 12th, 1841.

. . . . Stephen will not stay at Canonsburg; he says he has lost conceit of himself because he was once in his life a great fool and that was when he did not go back with brother William. He begs me to ask you to say that he must board with Ma and go to day school. Indeed, if I am in Alleghany town, I shall be almost too lonely without one child with me, for if I should be ill I would be in a bad way.

Stephen's own rather lame explanation of his leaving school is contained in the following letter to his brother, written from Pittsburgh, August 28:

My dear Brother,

I suppose you are surprised and probably displeased at me for not being more punctual in writing to you every fortnight as you wished to have me do. I will therefore proceed to make my best excuses.

When I wrote you from Canonsburg, I did not tell you whether I liked the place or not (if I remember right), but now I will take the liberty of telling you that I became more disgusted with the place as long as I stayed in it. It is not a good time to begin college in the middle of the session, as I could not get into any class for three or four days after I went there, and when I did get started in a recitation it was in irregular hours.

If I had gone as a regular student I might have been examined and got along very easily, but going as I did, just to stay a session or two, I suppose they did not care much whether I was attentive or not. Besides when I had been there but five days I took sick from a dizziness in my head occasioned by an overflow of the blood, and

was confined in bed for two days. (Whenever I would go to raise up out of bed I would become so dizzy that I could scarcely see.)

In the night of the second day of my sickness, my nose took to bleeding which made me feel better the next morning.

It so happened that one of the students was coming into town that day (Samuel Montgomery of Pittsburgh) and I concluded I would come in with him as he asked me to.

When I left Canonsburg your letter had not arrived. So that I wrote to Mr. Mercer to forward it as soon as it arrived, but nevertheless I did not receive it until about two weeks after you wrote it. Although you told me not to wait for your letters when I wrote, still I expected it every day, so that I was put beyond the regular time.

I hope you will pardon me for writing to you so extensively on the money subject. But at the same time I will let you know that a boy comes out mighty slim in Canonsburg without some of it in his pocket. Pa had not told me that he would furnish me with as much money as I needed or I would not have troubled you on that account. As we were all talking over different subjects the other evening, among others the subject of the Navy was talked of. Now to be Midshipman is just what I fancy. Pa is away in Washington County at a temperance meeting and will return this evening I think.

With these few lines I will hurry to a close by stating that we are all well and in good spirits. Hoping that you will ever be blessed with the same qualities, your ever affectionate and justly dutiful brother,

STEPHEN.

I will try hereafter to come up to the mark in the letter-writing line.

The idea of entering the Navy which so appealed to Stephen seems to have been abandoned, as it is not mentioned again. A few days later there is a letter from his father to William which gives a clear idea of Stephen's character at this time:

Pittsburgh, September 3, 1841.

. . . . I regret extremely that Stephen has not been able to appreciate properly your generous exertions in his behalf by availing himself of the advantages of a college education, which will cause him much regret before he arrives at my age and he will no doubt express these regrets in much sorrow to you, should you both live long after I shall be no more. He is at school now with Mr. Moody, a first rate teacher of mathematics in Pittsburgh and it is a source of much comfort to your mother and myself that he does not appear to have any evil propensities to indulge; he seeks no associates and his leisure hours are all devoted to musick, for which he possesses a strange talent.

At this time William B. Foster, Sr., was mayor of Alleghany City. There was some idea of sending Stephen back to Athens to school, but nothing came of it. He spent the winter at home and remained a problem to his

worthy parents. No one seems to have suggested the "strange talent for musick" as a solution of the difficulty. The following Spring his father again refers to him in a letter to William.

Dear William,

I wish you could make a target-bearer of Stephen, and find employment for him that would take him through the summer. He is uncommonly studious at home, but dislikes going to school. He says there is too much confusion in the school. I do not like to urge him so long as he discovers no evil or idle propensities. He says he would like to be in brother William's sunshine.

*(Later in the same month):*

Alleghany, March 30, 1842

. . . . I wrote you on the subject of Stephen and expect to hear from you soon; he is a very good boy, but I cannot get him to stick to school. He reads a great deal and writes some here in the office with me.

Robert P. Nevin described Stephen as "a boy of delicate constitution, not addicted to the active sports and vigorous habits of boys of his age. He only cared for a few intimate friends, and his character, thus secluded, naturally took on a sensitive, meditative cast and a growing disrelish for severer tasks."

Morrison Foster and Nevin both state that Stephen's first published song, "Open Thy Lattice, Love," was composed when he was sixteen, although it was not published until two years later. The words, which are anonymous, were taken from "The New Mirror"; the song was published by George Willig, of Philadelphia (not Baltimore, as Morrison Foster states).

The song is a distinct advance over the "Tioga Waltz" and "Sadly to My Heart Appealing." Simple as the harmonic outline is, it is sufficient to clothe the felicitous melody, which flows with the grace and spontaneity of Foster's best work.

The Fosters were then living in Alleghany City in a large two-family house facing the Common. The other half of the house was occupied by the family of a retired Army officer, Captain Pentland. The title page of "Open Thy Lattice, Love" states that it was "composed for





"The Old Folks at Home"  
The Parents of Stephen C. Foster



and dedicated to Miss Susan E. Pentland," who was Captain Pentland's daughter.

There is more than a suggestion in the reminiscences of that time of a romance between Susan Pentland and Stephen, but if there was such an affair, it could not have assumed very serious proportions at the time this song was written, for Susan was only eleven, and Stephen sixteen. Perhaps the real attraction existed not so much in the person of the fair young Susan, as in the fact that the Pentlands had a piano and the Fosters had none. Pianos were scarce in the forties and fifties, and the possession of one must have been a mark of great distinction. To Stephen's starving young soul, the Pentland piano must have been as an oasis in a dreary desert. Later the Fosters acquired a piano, but the date of this important event is a mystery.

At the present time there are three pianos which claim the honor of having inspired Stephen Foster to musical productivity. In the Carnegie Museum in Schenley Park, Pittsburgh, is a piano which once belonged to Stephen Foster. Miss Pentland's piano is now in the Foster Homestead on Penn Avenue. The third piano, with some claim to having been the "favorite," belonged to Miss Mary Woods. It was brought to Pittsburgh in 1849 by Henry Kleber, and is said to be one of the first two upright pianos to cross the Alleghany mountains. It was made in Leipzig, Germany, by Friedrich & Haupt, and preceded by many years the first attempts by American manufacturers to make uprights, their attention being confined for many years after the importation of this instrument to grand and square pianos.

The story goes that while these two upright pianos were on exhibition in Mr. Kleber's store, Mrs. Woods, the mother of the present owner, selected one of them, after testing them both. Later in the same day, before the one selected by Mrs. Woods had been delivered to her, Stephen Foster tried the two pianos and chose the

one already sold. He was much disappointed when told that Mrs. Woods had already bought it. It is a tradition in the Foster family that Stephen spent many hours in the Woods' home, playing this piano, and it is probable that many of his songs were worked out on it.

This, however, was later than the period now under consideration. The Woods' piano did not appear on the scene until seven years after the composition of "Open Thy Lattice, Love." In the meantime Stephen had had some experience in business, for which he was ill suited, and had yielded more and more to his "strange talent" for music. The speculations in the family as to Stephen's future do not seem to have arrived at any very satisfactory conclusion, and he was not able to map out a career for himself. He was following the line of least resistance, which led him inevitably into song-writing.

In the year 1844 occurred a Presidential campaign which was distinguished by political song-singing. President Tyler was a candidate for reelection, his opponent being James K. Polk. The principal issue of the campaign was the controversy with England over the boundary of "the Oregon Country," a controversy which produced the familiar slogan, "Fifty-four-forty or fight." The country seemed to be on the brink of war with England and the excitement during the campaign was intense. There were innumerable parades and processions and both parties organized singing clubs to give expression to their enthusiasm in the political songs of the day. After the conclusion of the campaign, most of these singing societies went out of existence, although a few lingered on, gradually losing their political character and becoming purely social clubs.

Among the organizations which survived was one which met twice a week at the Foster home. Negro melodies were most popular with this singing-club, and one evening Stephen Foster produced a composition of his own. It was called "Louisiana Belle." A week later

he had another song to try out, "Uncle Ned." This was in 1845, when Stephen was nineteen. Neither song was published until two years later, although they are said to have become widely popular in Pittsburgh, being passed by "word of mouth."

It was decided in the family councils that it was high time for Stephen to get to work, so the following year, 1846, he was sent to Cincinnati, where he became a book-keeper for his brother Dunning, who was in the commission business. Morrison Foster says that his books were models of neatness and accuracy, but the work must have been very distasteful to him, and he did not remain long, returning to Pittsburgh in 1848.

It was while he was in Cincinnati that his musical productions received an impetus sufficient to suggest the idea that he might find in music a career worthy of his serious attention. The song "There's a Good Time Coming" was published in October, 1846, by Peters & Field of Cincinnati. The origin of this song is not mentioned by either Nevin or Morrison Foster. It was "composed for and respectfully dedicated to Miss Mary D. Keller, of Pittsburgh." The words are "Lines from the London Daily News":

We may not live to see the day,  
But earth shall glisten in the ray  
Of the good time coming:  
Cannon balls may aid the truth,  
But there's a weapon stronger,  
We'll win our battle by its aid,  
Wait a little longer.

There are eight verses in all, each celebrating some feature of the good time coming:

War in all men's eyes shall be  
A monster of iniquity,  
In the good time coming,  
Nations shall not quarrel then  
To prove which is the stronger,  
Nor slaughter men for glory's sake,  
Wait a little longer.

And a poor man's family  
Shall not be his misery,  
In the good time coming;  
Every child shall be a help  
To make his right arm stronger;  
The happier he the more he has,  
Wait a little longer.

Little children shall not toil  
Under or above the soil,  
In the good time coming,  
But shall play in healthful fields,  
Till limbs and minds grow stronger;  
And everyone shall read and write,  
Wait a little longer.

“There’s a Good Time Coming” does not seem to have had much success, but the following year a group of five songs was published, which not only brought fame to their author and a fortune to their publisher, but which mark an epoch in the history of music in America.

#### IV

### FIRST SONGS

That form of theatrical entertainment known as the "negro minstrel show" was in the first hey-day of its popularity. It originated prior to 1830, but did not reach its full development until more than ten years later. Like many other great discoveries, it seems to have been stumbled on by accident. Its origin is credited to an actor named Thomas D. ("Daddy") Rice, and it grew out of his singing, in costume and character, a negro song, "Jump Jim Crow." Henry E. Krehbiel, in his book, "Afro-American Folksongs," says that "if the best evidence obtainable on the subject is to be believed," Rice caught both song and character from the singing and dancing of an old deformed and decrepit negro in Louisville.

Writing in 1867, Robert P. Nevin gives the following account: Rice observed one day in Cincinnati a negro stage-driver singing the song:

Turn about and wheel about, and do jist so,  
And ebery time I turn about, I jump Jim Crow,

and conceived the idea that the song and character behind the footlights might tickle the fancy of the public as much as the sprig of shillallah and the red nose then popular among light comedians.

He did not have an opportunity to test the idea until the following autumn, when he was playing in Pittsburgh. The theatre, located on Fifth Street, is described as "an unpretending structure, rudely built of boards and of moderate proportions, but sufficient to satisfy the taste and secure the comfort of the few who dared to face the consequences and lend their patronage to an establishment under the ban of the Scotch-Irish Calvinists." According to Nevin, Rice obtained his costume

from a negro in attendance at Griffith's Hotel on Wood Street, named Cuff, who won a precarious living by letting out his open mouth as a mark for boys to pitch pennies into at three paces, and by carrying passengers' trunks from steamboats to hotels. The negro accompanied Rice to the theatre one evening and loaned his costume, for a brief period, to the service of art. Rice's appearance, with blackened face, clad in a ragged old coat, a forlornly dilapidated pair of shoes composed equally of patches and places for patches, a coarse straw hat in a melancholy condition of rent and collapse, and a black woolly wig, created a sensation which was greatly heightened by the rendition of the "Jim Crow" song and dance. But the success of the occasion was made doubly sure when the negro, hearing the whistle of a steamboat approaching Monongahela Wharf, and fearing loss of both business and prestige among his associates, rushed half-clad onto the stage and demanded his clothes.

"So," writes Nevin, "was born a school of music destined to excel in popularity all others, and to make the name of an obscure actor famous.

"The next day the song of 'Jim Crow' was on everybody's lips. Clerks hummed it at counters, artisans at their toils to the thunder of sledge and hammer, boys whistled it in the streets, ladies warbled it in parlors and housemaids repeated it to the chink of crockery in the kitchen." The tune was written down and provided with a piano accompaniment by W. C. Peters, a music dealer with a shop on Market Street, Pittsburgh. The music was reproduced on stone with an elaborately embellished title-page by John Newton, being the first specimen of lithography ever executed in Pittsburgh.

Although Rice is usually credited with having been the first "negro minstrel," his performance was not by any means the first time that a negro character had appeared on the stage to sing a song in character. As far



as is known, probably the first negro character on the English stage was "Mungo," a character in Bickerstaff's comic opera, *The Padlock*, at Drury Lane Theatre in London, in 1768. An old program, dated 1788, records the performance in London of a "comic dance," entitled "An Ethiopian Festival." There are other recorded performances of a somewhat similar character, but Rice's success was so great and the vogue he established so enduring that the honor of being the founder of the amusement may be left with him.

"Jim Crow" remained a nightly attraction at the theatre until the end of the season, when it was transferred to "Beale's Long Room," at the corner of Third and Market Streets. Another song and dance, "Clar de Kitchen," was added to it, soon followed by "Lucy Long," "Sich a Gittin' Upstairs," "Longtail Blue," and others, until a sizable repertoire had been built up.

Rice remained in Pittsburgh for two years, after which he took his negro entertainment to Philadelphia, Boston and New York, and later to England, where he enjoyed a vogue for a number of years. His idea was followed by others; for many years, however, the negro song and dance flourished, not on the theatrical stage, but in connection with travelling circuses and menageries. Between acts the "extravaganzaist" would appear in cork and wool to sing "Coal Black Rose," "Jim Along, Joe," or "Sittin' on a Rail," and to share the laughter and applause with the clowns and monkeys. The first performers sang alone, with an accompaniment by the circus band, but couples soon appeared and provided their own accompaniments on the banjo and bones.

In 1827 George W. Dixon was singing "Coal Black Rose" in Albany. In 1829 he appeared at the Chatham Square Theatre in New York, singing this song and "Longtail Blue" and "Zip Coon" in character, with a banjo. In 1830 the New York "Mirror" said of Dixon: "In his imitations of African character he is far inferior

to Tom Blakeley. Such exhibitions, by the way, ought to be confined to the circus."

The "Courier and Enquirer" thus described Rice's appearance in New York on November 25th, 1832:

When he (Rice) came forward to sing his celebrated song ("Jim Crow") before an overcrowded house, many of the audience were on the stage and had mixed themselves up hilariously in the drama of "Richard III," forming a ring about Booth and his opponent in the battle scene. They not only made Rice repeat the song some twenty times, but hemmed him in so that he actually had no room to perform the little dancing and turning about appertaining to the song. In the "after-piece," when a supper table was spread, the hungry swooped down like harpies and devoured the edibles.

With increasing popularity, the black-faced "song and dance artists" forsook the society of the sawdust ring and set up in business for themselves. Singers organized themselves into quartet bands, adding the fiddle and tambourine to the banjo and bones, introduced the hoe-down and conundrums to fill the intervals between songs, and went from town to town, hiring halls where there were no theatres.

One of the earliest of these "wandering minstrel" companies was that of Nelson Kneass, who, in addition to singing, and playing the banjo, could also play the piano, a distinction not possessed by many of his confrères. He also had some ambitions as a composer, and provided himself and his "minstrels" with a large part of their program. He has been credited with being the author and composer of the song "Ben Bolt," an honor to which he is not entitled. The poem, as is well known, is by Thomas Dunn English; the melody is an old German tune which was adapted to the words by Kneass, who first sang the song at a theatrical performance in Pittsburgh.

Kneass visited Pittsburgh from year to year, and finally disbanded his company there in 1845, owing to the "retirement to private life" of one of his "artists," one "Mr. Murphy." Some time after this a certain Mr. Andrews, dealer in confections, cakes and ices, rented a

second-floor hall on Wood Street, furnished it with chairs and small tables, erected a stage at one end, and proceeded to give a series of "entertainments." Admission was ten cents, the ticket purchased at the door being accepted later at face value toward payment for whatever might be called for at the tables. The enterprise was advertised widely and Kneass was engaged as impresario. To keep up public interest, prizes were offered from time to time, a bracelet for the best conundrum, a ring with an imitation ruby setting for the best comic song, a gold chain for the best sentimental song, and finally a silver cup for the best negro song. The silver cup was placed on exhibition and was to be awarded by a committee designated by the audience for the purpose at the time of the contest.

These "saloon entertainments" were not uncommon at this period, as they occupied a neutral ground upon which eschewers of theatrical performances could meet with abettors of playhouses, a consideration of ruling importance in Pittsburgh, where so many people carried on their legitimate inheritance of Cameronian fidelity to the old Presbyterian creed and practice.

Stephen Foster was in Cincinnati at this time, which probably was 1846 or 1847, but was persuaded by his brother Morrison to send a manuscript for Kneass's contest in Pittsburgh. Stephen sent the song "Way Down South, Where de Cane Grows." It did not win the prize, but both Morrison Foster and Nevin place considerable importance on this contest and the part it played in turning Stephen's attention more and more toward song-writing.

Morrison Foster relates that on the morning following the song-contest, he went to the United States Court to take out a copyright on the words and music in Stephen Foster's name, and found Nelson Kneass there attempting to copyright the song in his own name. "I informed Judge Irwin of the fraud," says Morrison Foster, "and

the rogue was glad to be allowed to depart unpunished." The copyright, however, was not taken out until 1848, by W. C. Peters.

In the meantime Stephen had given the manuscripts of this and others of his songs to W. C. Peters, the music-dealer who had arranged and published "Jump Jim Crow" in Pittsburgh fifteen years before. Peters had removed to Louisville, Ky., and had established a music business there. (Morrison Foster says that Peters had at one time been a music teacher to the Foster family.) Stephen had known him in Pittsburgh, and had sent the manuscripts to him at his request without any idea of their value. This fact is very significant, for it shows that neither Stephen nor, presumably, any of his family or friends, had as yet any inkling that his "strange talent for musick" could be anything else than a "weakness." Three of the songs presented to Peters were among Foster's most popular works; the publisher is said to have made \$10,000 out of them, thereby establishing a publishing business which flourished for many years.

The first of the songs to be published was "Louisiana Belle," which appeared in October, 1847. The copyright was taken out by W. C. Peters for " 'Louisiana Belle,' written for and sung by Joseph Murphy, of the 'Sable Harmonists'." No mention is made of the composer. The song was the first of five "Songs of the Sable Harmonists." The others were copyrighted and published in 1848, three by Stephen Foster, "O Susanna," "Uncle Ned," "Away Down South," and the last of the five, "Wake Up Jake, or the Old Iron City," by George Holman.

The records of the Copyright Office in Washington furnish some interesting testimony in support of Robert P. Nevin's statement that these songs had achieved great popularity before their publication, being spread about orally among the people in true folk-song manner. The authentic version of "Uncle Ned" was deposited for

copyright on December 30th, 1848, by W. C. Peters, of Louisville. On May 16th, 1848, seven months prior to the Peters publication, a version of the song had been deposited for copyright by W. E. Millet, of New York, under the title, " 'Old Uncle Ned,' written and composed for Wm. Roark of the Sable Harmonists, by S. C. Foster of Cincinnati." Later in the same year, on December 16th, just two weeks before the deposit of the Peters edition, the publisher, F. D. Benteen, of Baltimore, deposited for copyright a song with the title, " 'Old Uncle Ned,' an Ethiopian melody arranged with symphonies and accompaniment for the voice and piano by R. O. Wilson."

Oscar G. Sonneck, formerly Chief of the Music Division of the Congressional Library, calls attention to the fact that Stephen Foster is not mentioned on this version of the song, although it is merely an arrangement (and a poor one at that) of the original song. The arranger apparently remembered only half of Foster's melody. The other half is woefully incorrect.

Evidently the songs had been made popular by a minstrel company known as "The Sable Harmonists," and their publication was the result rather than the cause of their popularity. It would also appear that Stephen Foster had no idea of the commercial value of his songs, and gave manuscript copies of them to any who asked. This attitude toward his music is further corroborated by the following letter written a few months after the publication of the songs:

Cincinnati, Ohio, May 25, 1849.

Mr. Wm. E. Miller,

Dear Sir:

I hasten to acknowledge receipt of your favor of the 21st, and to give you what information I can touching upon the subject of your inquiry.

I gave manuscript copies of each of the songs, "Louisiana Belle," "Uncle Ned," and "O Susannah" to several persons before I gave them to Mr. Peters for publication, but in neither instance was there any permission or restriction in regard to publishing them unless contained in a letter to Mr. Roark, accompanying the manuscript

of "Uncle Ned," although of this I am doubtful. Mr. Peters has my receipt for each of the songs.

The only information which I can give you in regard to the dates, as my memory does not serve me, must be in copying the years named on the title pages of the Cincinnati publications [*sic*] from which I infer that "Louisiana Belle" was copyrighted in 1847, the others in 1848.

If I can see Mr. Roark, who lives in our city, I will give you further information in regard to the letter which I wrote him.

I have the honor, Sir, to subscribe myself,

Very respectfully,                      STEPHEN FOSTER.

It will be observed that the Peters publications are referred to as "the Cincinnati publications." Morrison Foster refers to Peters as being in business in Cincinnati, although the copyrights were taken out by W. C. Peters, "of Louisville." (Later the name appears on the copyrights, "W. C. Peters, Cincinnati.")

Unfortunately, the "letter to Mr. Roark" and the "further information" referred to have not survived the passage of time, and there is no other evidence on the subject.

With the exception of "Uncle Ned" the songs are not especially characteristic of Stephen Foster, nor typical of him at his best. They are essentially "minstrel" songs, and require burnt cork and a banjo to reveal their true character. Negro minstrelsy had not made much artistic progress since its beginning about 1830. The negro was still made a buffoon, a crude caricature. Glibberish had become a staple of composition, the wit of the performance consisting largely in the misuse of language. A small amount of original composition was contributed from time to time, but for the most part the songs were adaptations of tunes in vogue among the Hardshell Baptists in Tennessee and at the Methodist Camp-meetings in Kentucky, with a few backwoods melodies, and now and then a reveller straying from the opera or the concert room.

Foster's songs are rollicking jingles, infectious tunes with insistent rhythm provided by a banjo accompaniment, the words a farrago of nonsense:

I come from Alabama,  
Wid my banjo on my knee,  
I'm gwine to Louisiana  
My true love for to see;  
It rained all night the day I left,  
The weather it was dry,  
The sun so hot I froze to death,  
Susanna, don't you cry!

I jumped aboard the telegraph,  
And trabeled down de ribber,  
De 'lectric fluid magnified  
And killed five hundred nigger;  
De bullgine bust, de horse run off,  
I really thought I'd die,  
I shut my eyes to hold my breath,  
Susanna, don't you cry!

"Way Down South" is a little better than this, and the music contains several rhythmic elements of the characteristic syncopation later known as "rag-time." The chorus of each of the songs was sung by a male quartet or chorus.

"Uncle Ned," on the other hand, belongs to a different world. Here the negro ceases to be a caricature and becomes a human being:

There was an old nigger, his name was Uncle Ned,  
He's dead long ago, long ago;  
He had no wool on top of his head,  
De place whar de wool ought to grow;  
Den lay down de shubble and de hoe,  
Hang up de fiddle and de bow,  
No more hard work for poor old Ned,  
He's gone whar de good niggers go.

"Uncle Ned" became enormously popular at once, and has always been one of the best-known of Foster's melodies. It is the first of the pathetic negro songs that set Foster apart from his contemporaries and gave him a place in musical history. In this type of song, universal in the appeal of its naïve pathos, he has never had an equal.

Two other songs were published in 1847. They are not particularly important except that they show the measure of Foster's ability in more serious vein than the minstrel songs. "What Must a Fairy's Dream Be"

was "Written and composed for and respectfully dedicated to Miss Mary H. Irwin." The original edition of the other song of this year, "Where Is Thy Spirit, Mary?" has been lost. A second edition was copyrighted in 1895 by F. G. Vandergrift and published by Geo. Mercer, Jr., of Pittsburgh, as "Inscribed to the memory of Mary Keller." Miss Keller was the young lady to whom he also dedicated the song, "There's a Good Time Coming," published in 1846. Musically speaking, "Where Is Thy Spirit, Mary?" is the most ambitious song that he had yet attempted. The verse-form is rather unusual, each verse beginning with an eight-bar phrase which is almost a recitative, before the commencement of the real melody. In both of these songs there is the first appearance in his music of the modulation to the relative minor of the original key. He seems to have been groping toward a larger harmonic vocabulary.

Another song of the same type was published by Peters in the following year (1848), "Stay, Summer Breath." It was "written and composed for and inscribed to Miss Sophie Marshall." Miss Marshall is described by Morison Foster as "an old friend of the family. She possessed a beautiful soprano voice, and sang with much sweetness and taste, and was a favorite with Stephen whilst he resided in Cincinnati."

There was also a "quickstep as performed by the military bands," entitled "Santa Anna's Retreat from Buena Vista," which was published for the piano as arranged by the composer.

Two other letters of this period throw some light on Stephen Foster's sudden emergence into fame and his attitude toward his music. One is to his brother Morison, written from Cincinnati April 27th, 1849:

Dear Mit,

You must be tired waiting for an answer to the many favors which I have received from you, not the least welcome of which was that introducing to my acquaintance Signor Biscaccianti and his accomplished lady. I called on Madame Biscaccianti and was as much



delighted by her conversation and agreeable manner as I was subsequently by her singing at her concerts. She spoke very affectionately of you and the ladies who accompanied you on the occasion of your visit to her, as if you had been her own brother as well as mine. Her concerts were very well attended, indeed such was her encouragement, notwithstanding the formidable opposition carried on at the theatre by Mr. Macready, that she expressed an intention to return after she should have made a visit to Louisville, where she is now singing.

In writing to Gil Smith, please say that I am very much grieved at having been the cause of so much trouble and humiliation to him on account of a miserable song, and tell him that if he has not already burned the copyright, as I certainly should have done, he may give it to Messrs. Firth & Pond any time that he may be in the neighborhood of No. 1 Franklin Square. If they will give him \$10, \$5, or even \$1 for it, let him make a donation of the amount to the Orphan Asylum, or any other charitable or praiseworthy institution. Messrs. Firth & Pond have written me for the song.

I did not read the articles which I marked in "The Atlas," but supposed them to be written in the usual style of the editor, whom I consider the most powerful and talented writer in the west, therefore you must not blame me if he treated of Kamchatka or Nootka Sound, I merely desired that you should have a touch of his quality.

Tell Ma she need not trouble herself about the health of Cincinnati, as our weather is very healthy, the cholera not having made its appearance. There is something about letter-writing which so runs away with my hand that my ideas can find no interpreter. I think I must study phonography, which will probably remove this blind brindle orthography and give my brain a lighter harness to work in.

With love to all,

Your affectionate brother,

STEPHEN.

On the margin of this letter is the following comment, written many years later, by Morrison Foster:

He was then about 22 years old, and was engaged in business in the office of my late brother, Dunning M. Foster, who with the late Archibald Irwin, Jr., composed the firm of Irwin & Foster. Who the editor of "The Atlas" was at that time, you will perhaps remember. Stephen's estimate of his ability may have been too high, but I know you will consider the fact that my brother was quite young then. The song Stephen refers to had been sent to Gilead A. Smith, a connection of ours in New York, to be by him delivered to a person who had requested Stephen to send him a song for public performances. Mr. Smith after calling several times, failed to find the person and so informed my brother. Hence the latter's invitation. I well remember that this very song was "Nelly Was a Lady," one of Stephen's best compositions. It afterwards sold in immense numbers and to a profit of several thousand dollars.

The significant features of the letter are the indications that Stephen still seems to have had no conception of the commercial value of his "miserable songs," and that his

fame had reached in a few months such proportions as to attract the attention and interest of a New York music-publishing house, one of the largest and foremost of the time.

This relation between Stephen Foster and the house of Firth, Pond & Co., was to grow and to endure through many years. Of the very considerable amount of correspondence which passed between them, only two or three letters have survived. One of the earliest was written by the publishers to Foster on September 12th of this year (1849):

No. 1 Franklin Square, New York.

S. C. Foster, Esq.,

Dear Sir:

Your favor of 8th instant is received and we hasten to reply.

We will accept the proposition therein made, viz., to allow you two cents upon every copy of your future publications issued by our house, after the expenses of publication are paid, and of course it is always our interest to push them as widely as possible. From your acquaintance with the proprietors or managers of different bands of "Minstrels," and from your known reputation, you can undoubtedly arrange with them to sing them and thus introduce them to the public in that way, but in order to secure the copyright exclusively for our house, it is safe to hand such persons printed copies only, of the pieces, for if manuscript copies are issued, particularly by the author, the market will be flooded with spurious issues in a short time.

It is also advisable to compose only such pieces as are likely both in the sentiment and melody to take the public taste. Numerous instances can be cited of composers whose reputation has greatly depreciated from the fact of their music becoming too popular and as a natural consequence they write too much and too fast and in a short time others supercede them.

As soon as "Brother Gum" makes his appearance he shall be joined to pretty "Nelly" and your interest in the two favorites duly forwarded to your address, say 50 copies of each.

We remain, in the hope of hearing from you soon,

Very truly yours,

FIRTH, POND & Co.

The "Pretty Nelly" referred to in this letter is the song "Nelly Was a Lady" mentioned by Morrison Foster as having been sent to New York by Stephen. It eventually found its way to Firth, Pond & Co., and was published by them in the latter part of 1849, or early in 1850, together with three other songs, under the

heading "Foster's Ethiopian Melodies." The reference in the letter to Foster's "known reputation" and his "acquaintance with the proprietors or managers of the different bands of 'Minstrels'" is another evidence of the extraordinary vogue already acquired by these minstrel songs, although none of them had been in print more than a year. Testimony to the same effect is the fact that each of the Firth, Pond & Co. songs contained on the title-page the line, "*By the author of 'Uncle Ned,' 'O Susanna,' etc.*" The advice with regard to the composer's giving manuscript copies of his songs to various singers is significant, as is also the warning against yielding to the injurious effects of sudden and too great popularity.

The four songs published by Firth, Pond & Co. as "Foster's Ethiopian Melodies" are "Nelly Was a Lady," "My Brudder Gum," "Dolcy Jones" and "Nelly Bly." They are among the best and most characteristic of Foster's songs. "Brudder Gum" is one of the nonsense songs:

White folks, I'll sing for you,  
Nuffin' else to do,  
Spend my time a-pickin' on de banjo,  
Hey, Brudder Gum!

My brudder Gum,  
My brudder Gum so fair,  
All de yaller galls runnin' round,  
Try to get a lock of his hair.

It would not have taken any great skill to make "Brudder Gum" "go" with any audience of that time. The happy-go-lucky absurdity of the negro minstrel, with his blackened face and wide-mouthed grin, never found a better vehicle than "Brudder Gum," with the crackling staccato of its banjo accompaniment and the rhythmic quirk afforded by the unduly long third line and the abrupt stop, "Hey, Brudder Gum."

"Dolcy Jones" contains a clever twist in the stutter at the end of each verse, "Da-da-d'-d'-Dolcy Jones."

"Nelly Bly" is so typically a folk-song that it seems difficult to believe that it was ever "written" by anybody. It is one of those simple little tunes that seem to go on their care-free way as inevitably as sunlight or the laughter of little children. It is one of the few happy songs ever written by Stephen Foster. Aside from the jingling nonsense of the minstrel songs, he turned instinctively to sentimental melancholy, the yearnings of homesickness and sad memories of the past. "Nelly Bly" is a song of contentment and plenty, more truly characteristic of the negro than "Brudder Gum" or "O Susanna."

Nelly Bly! Nelly Bly!  
Bring de broom along,  
We'll sweep de kitchen clean, my dear,  
And hab a little song;

Poke de wood, my lady lub,  
And make de fire burn,  
And while I take de banjo down,  
Just gib de mush a turn!

Truly it is a "dulcem melody."

"Nelly Was a Lady" is one of Foster's best melodies; of the utmost simplicity, it speaks with the authentic accents of true and sincere emotion. No amount of elaboration or sophistication could add to the elegiac tenderness of this plaintive little tune, which evokes a mood of gentle sorrow as unerringly to-day as it did in 1849.

Down on de Mississippi floating,  
Long time I trabble on de way,  
All night de cotton-wood a-toting,  
Sing for my true-lub all de day.

*Nelly was a lady,  
Last night she died,  
Toll de bell for lubly Nell,  
My dark Virginny bride.*

Now, I'm unhappy and I'm weeping,  
Can't tote de cotton-wood no more;  
Last night, while Nelly was a-sleeping,  
Death came a-knocking at de door.

Close by de margin ob de water,  
Whar de lone weeping willow grows,  
Dar lib'd Virginny's lubly daughter,  
Dar she in death may find repose.

Down in de meadow 'mong de clober,  
Walk wid my Nelly by my side;  
Now all dem happy days am ober,  
Farewell, my dark Virginny bride.

This is not the negro of "Jump Jim Crow" and "Zip Coon," but of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

## V

### AMBITION

Stephen Foster was now well launched on his career as a song-writer. At twenty-three, success had come to him suddenly, unexpectedly and to an amazing degree. His "strange talent for musick" had set a nation singing, and his melodies were soon to travel overseas into every corner of the world. He had discovered within himself a vein of pure gold and he set himself to develop the riches of this unsuspected and miraculous gift of God. He left his brother's office in Cincinnati and returned to Pittsburgh intending to devote himself to study and composition. His prospects were of the brightest. His first attempts at composition had struck the chord of popular favor and, in discovering him, the public had helped him discover himself. He had not had to learn his art by struggle and self-denial, nor to adapt his wares to his market by patience and labor. He voiced instinctively and spontaneously the heart of the people and the spirit of the times.

He returned to his father's home in Alleghany City and fitted up a back-room at the top of the house as a "study." His experience in Cincinnati had taught him that he had no taste or aptitude for a business life, and he never attempted it again.

His brother Morrison says that he now "devoted himself to the study of music as a science." Just how much "studying" he did is doubtful. Unfortunately, there is no evidence in his music itself to indicate that he "studied deeply and burned much midnight oil over the works of the masters, especially Mozart, Beethoven and Weber," nor that "he struggled for years and sounded the depths of musical science." That he was acquainted with the music of these masters is no doubt true, but the statement that he studied them carefully or derived much

benefit from them may be attributed to the loving admiration of his brother.

In company with Charles Shiras, publisher of "The Albatross," he studied the French and German languages, for which he is reputed to have displayed remarkable aptitude. Another accomplishment of this period was painting in water-colors. As none of his pictures can be found at the present time (although Morrison Foster says they are "yet preserved with pride"), it is impossible to judge of the extent of his talent in that direction.

The year following his return from Cincinnati (1850) saw the publication of fifteen compositions, fourteen songs and one piano piece, the largest output of any year of his life except 1862 and 1863. Of the fourteen songs, six were negro songs obviously put forth to capture the favor of the "minstrel" public. Of these, "Gwine to Run All Night," commonly known as "Camptown Races," achieved the greatest popularity and is the only one remembered to-day. The survival of this song is rather difficult to explain, although its success with the audiences of the time in which it was written is easily understood. Like many of these minstrel songs, its principal element of composition is insistent rhythm. The "tune" is of the most elementary description, but the listener is carried along irresistibly by the strong rhythmic pulse, with the recurring chorus, "Doo-dah-doo-dah day." It celebrates the disreputable negro of the "Jim Crow" type, and the words are for the most part nonsensical. The same description applies to "'Way Down in Ca-i-ro," "Oh Lemuel, Go Down to the Cotton Field" and "Angelina Baker." The other two negro songs of this year, "Dolly Day" and "Melinda May," are love-songs.

With the exception of "'Way Down in Ca-i-ro," all of these songs were sung by Christy's Minstrels, Campbell's Minstrels, The New Orleans Serenaders, and

other minstrel companies. Several of them were dedicated to special singers who introduced them to the public.

The other songs of this year were sentimental effusions of no great importance, except in so far as they indicate that Foster had ambitions aside from those of the burnt-cork stage. With the exception of "The Spirit of My Song," the words of all the songs are by the composer. They drip with melancholy sentiment, but in that respect they are not different from other poetic ebullitions of the day. The lyricists of the '40's and '50's concerned themselves chiefly with fair maidens who met untimely deaths, voices from by-gone days, and flowers that faded all too soon. Foster's Muse was no more tearful than any of her contemporaries. "Lily Ray" is one of the first of that numerous company of lovely departed maidens who occupy so prominent a place in Stephen Foster's writings:

Grief, to thy memory,  
Tuneth a lay,  
Lovely, departed one,  
Sweet Lily Ray.

Akin to Omar's

Alas, that spring should vanish with the rose,  
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close.

is this:

Ah, may the red rose live away,  
To smile upon earth and sky,  
Why should the beautiful ever weep,  
Why should the beautiful die?

Lulled by the dirge in the cypress bough,  
That tells of departed flowers,  
Ah! that the butterfly's gilded wing  
Fluttered in evergreen bowers!

Sad is my heart for the blighted plants,  
Its pleasures are aye as brief,  
They bloom at the young year's joyful call  
And fade at the autumn leaf!

Another of these 1850 songs is



Give the stranger happy cheer,  
When o'er his cheek the tear-drops start;  
The balm that flows from one kind word,  
May heal the wound in a breaking heart.

"The Voice of By-gone Days," published in this year, is a vocal duet, dedicated to Robert P. Nevin, father of the composer, Ethelbert Nevin, to whose reminiscences of Stephen Foster reference has been made. Musically speaking it is a feeble effort, the "duet" being constructed by doubling the melody at the interval of a third below.

Four of these 1850 songs were published by Firth, Pond & Co., of New York, the others by F. D. Benteen, of Baltimore. With both of these publishers he had signed contracts on a royalty basis.

This year, his first as a professional composer, was important in his life for another reason, for it was the date of his marriage to Miss Jane Denny McDowell, the daughter of Dr. Andrew N. McDowell, one of Pittsburgh's leading physicians. Of this event, so important and significant, little can be said except that it took place July 22nd, 1850. Of the love-affair which preceded it or the circumstances surrounding it, there remains not a trace. The fair flowers of many a forgotten spring-time, of which he sang so feelingly, have not vanished more completely than the memory of his own romance.

The young lady was a singer, as she is mentioned as the contralto of a "Stephen Foster Quartet," the soprano being Susan Pentland, to whom Stephen had dedicated "Open Thy Lattice, Love" years before. Miss McDowell was probably one of the young ladies to whom the young composer turned for inspiration and encouragement, although among his numerous dedications none is to her.

The marriage seems to have been an unhappy one. It would be idle, and even impertinent, to speculate as to the causes of the unhappiness, except in so far as it

might shed some light upon Foster's subsequent career and his failure to develop as a composer. Certain it is that he failed to realize the ambitions upon which he had embarked so hopefully, and from this time he seems to have drifted slowly toward the inevitable final tragedy. Whether this was due to disappointment in his marriage or to innate characteristics, no one can now say. It has been suggested that his intemperate habits caused his wife to leave him, but there is no evidence that this weakness, which clouded the last years of his life, had fastened itself upon him to any great extent at the time of his marriage. On the contrary, it seems probable that it had not. So far as his marriage is concerned, it might have been either a cause or an effect. It may be that his wife had little sympathy with the impractical dreamer she had married. In this respect Foster's story is like that of many other men of great talent. The statement, sometimes made, that he had married "beneath him," is hardly borne out by the facts, for Miss McDowell was the daughter of a prominent physician, whose standing in the city may be judged from the fact that he was called upon to attend Charles Dickens when that distinguished visitor was taken ill in Pittsburgh during his first American tour.

Her great-grandfather was President of the College at Annapolis, Maryland, in 1799, and for many years the family preserved a letter written to him by George Washington in the last year of his life:

Consequent of a letter I have received from Mr. Stuart, I have been induced to confide to your care the young gentleman who will deliver this letter (George Washington Parke Custis). You will find him intelligent, truthful and moral, and I have reason to hope he will live to justify the best expectations of his friends, and to be useful in the councils of his country.

It is quite possible that the unhappiness of the marriage has been exaggerated. Foster's whole life-story is clouded by a mass of gossipy, unreliable reminiscences, and his defects as well as his virtues have been exploited

to make good "copy." As late as 1860 there are references in his letters to "Jane" and "Marian" (his daughter) and although his wife was not with him in New York at the time of his death in 1864, she came on immediately on receipt of the news and accompanied the body home. It is a subject that we would gladly pass over in silence, were it not for the fact that a true picture of Foster's life would be impossible without it. So much has already been written and said about his marriage and his intemperance, that it would seem to be advisable to examine both stories in the light of whatever authentic historical evidence there may be.

The only suggestion in any of the family letters or papers that Stephen's marriage was not happy is contained in a letter written in 1853 to Morrison Foster by his sister Henrietta, who was living in Youngstown, Ohio. Several lines have been carefully scratched out, evidently in deference to Stephen's memory, although no good purpose would seem to be served at this time by such deletion.

Youngstown, June 21st, 1853.

My beloved Brother,

. . . . How sorry I feel for dear Stephy, though when I read your letter I was not at all surprised at the news it contained in regard to him and—(name scratched out). Last winter I felt convinced—(three lines scratched out, ending in the word "mistake"). Though I never wrote a word of the kind to Stephy, for I thought he had trouble enough already. Tell him to come out and stay a while with me; we have a delightful house, well shaded by trees and I know it must be pleasanter here than in Pittsburgh this hot weather. You did not tell me what he had done with little Marian. I feel quite concerned about her; dear little lamb, who is she with? Give much love to Stephy for me and tell him to feel assured that he has the prayers and sincere sympathy of his sister Etty. Dear boy, may God lead him in the ways of peace and fill his heart with that love which alone is satisfying and which never disappoints, a love that will take such complete possession of the soul, as to make all other loves but matters of small importance.

During the first year of his married life, Stephen worked industriously at his new vocation of song-writing. Fourteen songs were published in the year 1851; of ten the composer wrote the words as well as the music. If

most of them are commonplace, at least one of them is Stephen Foster at his best. "The Old Folks at Home" is Foster's chief claim to remembrance. Aside from one or two national airs, born of great historical crises, such as the "Marseillaise," this is probably the most widely known and loved song ever written. It has been translated into every European language and into many Asian and African tongues. It has been sung by millions the world over and has long since passed out of the realm of written song to be incorporated into the body of folk-music passed orally from generation to generation, breathing the very soul of the people. There are many legends with regard to the enormous sales of this song. Even if the figures were available, which they are not, they would but faintly indicate its widespread popularity, for it is a song which travels not by the printed page, but by oral tradition. It was published by Firth, Pond & Co., and the sales within a few years ran up into hundreds of thousands, while Foster received in royalties an amount variously estimated from \$15,000 upwards.

The magic of this wonderful melody defies analysis. In some subtle and instinctive way it expresses the homesick yearning over the past and the far-away which is the common emotional heritage of the whole human race. If art is an attempt of the human spirit to express itself in its relation to life, and if simplicity of means, as well as lucidity, are to be accounted artistic virtues, then "The Old Folks at Home" must remain for all time one of the greatest achievements of musical art.

The first version of this song, in Stephen Foster's own handwriting, is to be found in a manuscript book which he used for many years, now in the possession of his granddaughter, Mrs. A. D. Rose, custodian of the Foster Memorial Homestead in Pittsburgh. The first draft of the song was entitled, " 'Way down upon de old plantation," and sings of the Pedee River instead of the Swanee:



Way down upon de old plantation

Way down upon de Pedee river  
Far far away

Here's where my heart is turning eber  
Here's where my childhoods play

Way down upon de <sup>barren</sup> Pedee river

Far far away

Here's where my heart is turning eber  
Here's where de old folks play

All up and down de whole creation  
Saddy & round

Still hanging for de old plantation  
And for de old folks in home

Original Version of "The Old Folks at Home"

(Photograph from the Manuscript Book)

'Way down upon de Pedee ribber,  
Far, far away,  
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber,  
Dere's wha my brudders play.

That he was in doubt as to the suitability of the word "Pedee" is indicated by the double line drawn under it. Immediately under this tentative first verse, on the same page, are the words exactly as published; with "Pedee" crossed out and "Swanee" written above it:

'Way down upon the Swanee Ribber,  
Far, far away,  
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber,  
Dere's wha de old folks stay;  
All up and down de whole creation,  
Sadly I roam,  
Still longing for de old plantation,  
And for de old folks at home.

Morrison Foster tells how his brother came into his office on the banks of the Monongahela River one day and asked him to suggest the two-syllable name of a Southern river for use in a song. Morrison suggested "Yazoo," and when that was rejected, took down an atlas and turned to a map of the United States. A brief search located the name "Swanee," belonging to a little river in Florida emptying into the Gulf of Mexico.

"That's it, that's it exactly" exclaimed Stephen; and thus was immortalized an inconspicuous stream which Stephen Foster had never seen, nor even heard of, until after he had written the song which was destined to make its name a symbol of home-longing the world over.

One little hut among de bushes  
One dat I love,  
Still sadly to my memory rushes,  
No matter where I rove.  
When will I see de bees a-humming  
All 'round de comb?  
When will I hear de banjo tumming  
Down in my good old home?

The manuscript book referred to above is one of the most valuable of the memorabilia of Stephen Foster. Covering a period of ten years, he used it to preserve his ideas for songs and to work out these ideas into their

final form. The book is dated "Alleghany City, June 26th, 1851." The first pages are taken up with the words of the song "Laura Lee," which was published later in the same year by F. D. Benteen, of Baltimore. The pages of this book bear eloquent testimony that the childlike simplicity of Foster's verses was not the outcome of accident or the unconscious outpouring of an untutored brain, but the result of deliberate and painstaking effort. He had the true artist's feeling for the perfect phrase, and he sought it patiently and persistently.

For instance, the sketches for "Laura Lee" show how he worked over the phrase "desert isle," which occurs in the second verse of this song. The first version is:

Bright were a desert isle,  
Far in the sea,  
Warmed by thy sunny smile,  
Sweet Laura Lee.

A few lines below this, the phrase occurs again:

Earth seems a desert isle,  
Far in the sea.

On the next page:

How like a desert isle  
Earth seems to me,  
Robbed of thy sunny smile,  
Sweet Laura Lee.

This is the form finally adopted, although his experiments with this and other phrases continue for several pages.

The pages of this book contain various notations in Foster's writing, such as "Rented office July 28th, '51," "Sent Laura Lee July 19th," and the address of "Cramer, Beale & Co., Music Publishers, 210 Regent St., London." If he ever had any correspondence with these publishers, it evidently came to naught, as there is no record of their having published any of his songs. An English edition of forty of his songs was published many years later by C. Sheard, London, during the vogue of the Christy Minstrels in England and after the composer's death.



Stephen Foster's relations with E. P. Christy, the minstrel, are disclosed in the following letters, written at this time. These two letters were recently sold at auction in New York City and are among the few Foster autographs that have found their way into public auction:

Alleghany, June 12, 1851.

Mr. E. P. Christy,  
Dear Sir:

I have just received a letter from Messrs. Firth, Pond & Co., stating that they have copyrighted a new song of mine, "Oh Boys, Carry Me Along," but will not be able to issue it yet, owing to other engagements. This will give me time to send you the manuscript and allow you the privilege of singing it at least two weeks and probably a month before it is issued (unless they catch it up from you). If you will send me \$10.00 immediately, I pledge myself as a gentleman of the old school to give you the manuscript. I have written Firth, Pond & Co. not to publish it until they hear again from me. This song is certain to become popular as I have taken great pains with it. If you accept my proposition, I will make it a point to notify you hereafter whenever I have a new song and send the manuscript to you on the same terms, reserving to myself in all cases the exclusive privilege of publishing. Thus it will become notorious that your band brings out the new songs. You can state in the papers that the song was composed expressly for you. I make this proposition to you because I am sure of the song's popularity.

Very respectfully,

STEPHEN C. FOSTER.

Christy accepted the proposition, as the second letter shows.

June 20th, 1851.

Your favor of the 12th instant enclosing \$10 for the first privilege of singing "Oh Boys, Carry Me Along" is received. Accept my thanks. Herewith I send you the manuscript according to agreement. I am not certain that you use a piano in your band, but I have arranged an accompaniment for that instrument at a venture. If you have a tenor voice in the company that can sing up to G with ease (which is probable) it would be better to sing the song in the key of G. Thus you will not carry the bass voice quite so low. I hope you will preserve the harmony in the chorus just as I have written it and practise the song well before you bring it out. It is especially necessary that the person who sings the verses should know all the words perfectly, as the least hesitation in the singing will damn any song,—but this of course you know as well as myself. Remember it should be sung in a pathetic, not a comic, style. You will find the last three verses on another page of this letter. I regret that it is too late to have the name of your band on the title-page, but I will endeavor to place it along on future songs and will cheerfully do anything else in my humble way to advance your interest.

Very respectfully yours,

STEPHEN C. FOSTER.

P. S. I have not yet done anything at the "night funeral," etc., but will probably make something of it one of these days.

The "night funeral" of the postscript is evidently a reference to an idea for a song, but nothing seems to have come of it, as there is no song containing such an idea. The song "Oh Boys, Carry Me 'Long," was published about a month after the date of the second letter, by Firth, Pond & Co., as "A Plantation Melody, Written and Composed by Stephen C. Foster."

Oh, boys, carry me 'long,  
Der's no more trouble for me,  
I'se gwine to roam  
In a happy home  
Where all de niggers am free!

E. P. Christy was probably the most successful of all the black-face minstrels of that time. He claimed to be the originator of the "minstrel show." The first minstrel troupes consisted of quartets, each man, in addition to singing, being able to play an instrument, usually either the banjo, the "fiddle," the "bones" or the tambourine. One of the first of these quartets was organized by "Dan" Emmett, the author and composer of "Dixie."

In 1842 Christy organized a large troupe in Buffalo, introducing the form of entertainment afterwards associated with the name "minstrel show." In addition to its size this company was an innovation in the fact that they sat in a semicircle on the stage, with "interlocutor" and "end-men." Their ballads were sung by a solo voice with the entire company joining in the chorus. Christy was also the first to introduce dialogue and "jokes" between the various members of the company, as well as injecting "varieties" into the second part of his entertainment.

The Buffalo company was disbanded, and Christy's real career did not begin until 1846. Before his death he achieved both fame and fortune. "Christy Minstrels" was a name to conjure with in those days, and he had a

host of imitators. He enjoyed an enormous vogue in England during the 1850's and '60's, his achievements including a "command performance" before Queen Victoria. Even the great Mr. Gladstone was sometimes to be found in Christy's audience.

One of the tributes to the negro minstrel of the Christy type is from the pen of Thackeray:

I heard a humorous balladist not long since, a minstrel who performed a negro ballad that, I confess, moistened these spectacles in a most unexpected manner. I have gazed at thousands of tragedy queens dying on the stage and expiring to appropriate blank verse, and I never wanted to wipe them; they have looked up, be it said, at many scores of clergymen without being dimmed; and behold, a vagabond with corked face and a banjo sings a little song, strikes a wild note and sets the heart thrilling with happy pity.

Bayard Taylor, in "India, China and Japan," published in 1853, describes a wandering Hindoo minstrel singing "O Susanna" and other Ethiopian melodies in Delhi.

The singing of Foster's songs by the Christy Minstrels undoubtedly had much to do with their widespread popularity. A book of the words of songs sung by Christy's Minstrels, published in 1851 for sale at the performances, contains the words of forty-six songs, of which fourteen are by Stephen Foster.

The song "The Old Folks at Home" was published by Firth, Pond & Co. in the fall of 1851 as "Ethiopian Melody as sung by Christy's Minstrels. Written and composed by E. P. Christy." Foster sold to Christy the privilege of singing several of his songs before publication, one of them being "Oh Boys, Carry Me 'Long," mentioned in the letters quoted above. In the case of "The Old Folks at Home," he sold not only the right to sing the song in advance of publication, but the privilege of publishing Christy's name on the title-page as author and composer. Morrison Foster states that Christy paid \$500 for this privilege, but there is evidence that his memory was at fault with regard to the amount. This

evidence is a statement in Stephen Foster's own handwriting of the amounts received on thirty-six of his compositions, including many of the most popular ones. This statement, which is now in the Congressional Library at Washington, is dated January 27th, 1857, and contains the following foot-note:

In the amounts received I have included \$15 on the two songs "Old Folks at Home" and "Farewell, Lilly," from E. P. Christy, also \$10 on each of the songs, "Old Dog Tray," "Oh Boys," [*sic*] "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground," and "Ellen Bayne."

As the amount received for "Oh Boys, Carry Me 'Long" is correct, it seems hardly probable that Stephen would have been so far wrong concerning the sum he received for selling the authorship of "The Old Folks at Home." At any rate, whatever Christy may have paid for the privilege of being known even for a short time as the composer of "The Old Folks at Home," it was an honor which did not long remain his, as later editions of the song contained the name of the real composer, and there has never been any doubt as to its true authorship.

The other songs of this year (1851) are fair examples of the sentimental song of the period, but are not of great interest to-day. One of them, "Wilt Thou Be Gone, Love," is in the form of a duet, the words being paraphrased from Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet":

Wilt thou be gone, love, gone, love, from me?  
Stay, 'tis the nightingale that sings in yonder tree,  
Deem not 'tis the lark, love, day is not yet near,  
Believe me, 'tis the nightingale whose song hath  
pierced thine ear.

This is one of the most elaborate of Foster's compositions, and was no doubt warbled tenderly by antebellum Romeos and Juliets.

Another song copyrighted in this year is "I Would Not Die in Summer Time," "an answer to the new and beautiful song, 'I Would Not Die in Spring Time',





written and composed by Stephen C. Foster." The Springtime song is not recorded in the Copyright Office in Washington, but is given by Morrison Foster in his collected songs, and was presumably published in this year or just previous.

The industry with which Stephen Foster set out on his career as a professional song-writer does not seem to have endured for long. After the second year, the output of songs grows meagre. Only three songs were published in the next year (1852), although one of them is among his best, "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground." Like many of the other negro songs, it was sung by Christy's Minstrels, being among those mentioned by Foster as having been sung by Christy in advance of publication. This poignant song of sorrow is one of the loveliest of Foster's melodies:

Round de meadows am a-ringing  
De darkey's mournful song,  
While de mocking-bird am singing,  
Happy as de day am long,

Where de ivy am a-creeping,  
O'er de grassy mound,  
Dare old massa am a-sleeping,  
Sleeping in de cold, cold ground.

Down in de corn-field,  
Hear dat mournful sound,  
All de darkeys am a-weeping,  
Massa's in de cold, cold ground.

With one exception, all of the songs composed from 1852 to 1860, a period of nine years, were published by Firth, Pond & Co., of New York.

Five new songs appeared in 1853, as well as a piano piece, "Holiday Schottische," and "The Old Folks Quadrille," "Introducing 'Old Folks at Home,' 'Oh Boys, Carry Me 'Long,' 'Nelly Bly,' 'Farewell, My Lilly Dear,' and 'Cane Brake Jig.'" W. C. Peters also published a version of "Uncle Ned" with "sacred" [?] words:

Then away with earth's cares and its woe,  
With your joys and your sorrows below,  
For no more tears from your eyes will be shed,  
When you've gone where the sanctified go!

Of the five new songs of this year, the two which gained the greatest popularity were sung by the Christy Minstrels, "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Old Dog Tray." The latter song achieved a tremendous vogue immediately, which endured until long after the Civil War, but it does not exhibit the signs of permanence of "My Old Kentucky Home" and "The Old Folks at Home." It is said that 125,000 copies of "Old Dog Tray" were sold within eighteen months of publication, but the actual figures are not available. Of the origin of this song, Morrison Foster says:

An old friend of ours, Col. Matthew Stewart, gave Stephen a handsome setter dog, which for a long time was his constant companion. We lived upon the East Common of Alleghany, a wide open space, now improved into a beautiful park. Stephen often watched this dog with much pleasure, playing with the children on the Common. When he wrote of "Old Dog Tray," he put into verse and song the sentiments elicited by remembrances of this faithful dog.

He was easily disturbed from sleep at night and used every precaution to be as quiet as possible. A strange dog got into one of the back buildings one night and howled at intervals. Stephen finally could endure it no longer, and sallying forth partly dressed with a poker in his hand, pounded the poor dog away from the neighborhood. The family had a good laugh at the author of "Old Dog Tray" the next day.

There is a tradition that "My Old Kentucky Home" was written at the home of a relative of the Foster family, Judge John Rowan of Bardstown, Kentucky, who was also U. S. Senator. This story cannot be verified. It was certainly not necessary for Stephen Foster to be actually in Kentucky at the time, any more than it was necessary for him to be familiar with Florida in mentioning the Swanee River. The important thing is that the song rings true and expresses an emotion deep-rooted in the human soul. Its only rival in the affectionate esteem of the multitudes is "The Old Folks at Home," which it closely resembles in spirit. Both songs sing of loneliness



and longing, of yearning over the happiness of days gone by;

They hunt no more for the possum and the coon,  
On the meadow, the hill and the shore,  
They sing no more by the glimmer of the moon,  
On the bench by the old cabin door.  
The day goes by, like a shadow o'er the heart,  
With sorrow where all was delight,  
The time has to come when the darkies have to part,  
Then my old Kentucky home, good night!

The head must bow and the back will have to bend,  
Wherever the darkey must go,  
A few more days and the trouble all will end  
In the field where the sugar-canes grow.  
A few more days for to tote the weary load,  
No matter, 'twill never be light,  
A few more days till we totter on the road,  
Then my old Kentucky home, good night!

*Weep no more, my lady,  
Oh, weep no more to-day,  
We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home,  
For the old Kentucky home, far away!*

It will be observed that Foster has forsaken the crude negro dialect of the early songs. Although this is a negro song, and the words are supposed to issue from the lips of a negro, the language is the white man's language. It is a noteworthy fact that from this time on, Stephen Foster never again made use of the negro dialect, with the exception of the songs, "Glendy Burke," written in 1860, and "Don't Bet Your Money on the Shanghai," in 1861. "Old Black Joe," one of the most successful of the negro songs, like "My Old Kentucky Home," is in the language of the white man. It should also be observed that the word "nigger" has been supplanted by "darkey." This change had taken place gradually, and for a time he used both words, but now he had definitely given up "nigger" and never used it again.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the Foster family were all ardent Democrats and heartily opposed to the Abolition movement.

## VI DRIFTING

The records of Stephen Foster's life during these important years are scanty. Of the few letters surviving from this period, one of the most illuminating is the following:

Pittsburgh, May 25, 1852.

E. P. Christy, Esq.

Dear Sir:

As I once intimated to you, I had the intention of omitting my name on my Ethiopian songs, owing to the prejudice against them by some, which might injure my reputation as a writer of another style of music, but I find that by my efforts I have done a great deal to build up a taste for the Ethiopian songs among refined people by making the words suitable to their taste, instead of the trashy and really offensive words which belong to some songs of that order. Therefore I have concluded to reinstate my name on my songs and to pursue the Ethiopian business without fear or shame and lend all my energies to making the business live, at the same time that I will wish to establish my name as the best Ethiopian song-writer. But I am not encouraged in undertaking this so long as "The Old Folks at Home" stares me in the face with another's name on it. As it was at my own solicitation that you allowed your name to be placed on the song, I hope that the above reasons will be sufficient explanation for my desire to place my own name on it as author and composer, while at the same time I wish to leave the name of your band on the title page. This is a little matter of pride in myself which it will certainly be to your interest to encourage. On the receipt of your free consent to this proposition, I will, if you wish, willingly refund you the money which you paid me on that song, though it may have been sent me for other considerations than the one in question, and I promise in addition to write you an opening chorus in my best style, free of charge, and in any other way in my power to advance your interests hereafter. I find I cannot write at all unless I write for public approbation and get credit for what I write. As we may probably have a good deal of business with each other in our lives, it is best to proceed on a sure basis of confidence and good understanding, therefore I hope you will appreciate an author's feelings in the case and deal with me with your usual fairness. Please answer immediately.

Very respectfully yours,

STEPHEN C. FOSTER.

This letter throws a flood of light on Foster's attitude toward his music, and on the status of the "Ethiopian" song. It also proves that Christy was named as the author and composer of "The Old Folks at Home" on

Foster's own suggestion, and it intimates that Christy paid for the *use* of the song, as in the case of "Oh Boys" and the other songs mentioned, and not for the credit of the authorship. ("I will willingly refund you the money which you paid me on that song, though it may have been sent me for other considerations than the one in question.")

Evidently, Christy gave his consent to have his name removed from the song, as Foster's name appears on all later editions, but he apparently did not accept Foster's generous offer to refund the money paid for the song, as it is mentioned in the royalty list drawn up by Foster in 1857, to which reference has already been made. It hardly seems likely that Christy would have paid as much as \$500 for having his name on the song as author when the plan originated with Foster. If the amount had been as large as this, the refunding of it would have probably received more than a mere passing reference in the letter just quoted.

The intention expressed in this letter to lend all his energies to "the Ethiopian business" and establish his name as "the best Ethiopian song-writer" was not carried out. In fact, at the time the words were written, Foster's production of "Ethiopian" songs was practically at an end.

An excursion to New Orleans, in 1852, is thus related by Morrison Foster:

In February, 1852, our brother, Dunning McNair Foster, came to Pittsburgh with his steamboat, the "James Millinger," to load a cargo for New Orleans. Stephen and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew L. Robinson (Mrs. Robinson was Susan Pentland), Miss Jessie Lightner, Mrs. William Robinson and her daughter, Miss Mary Ann, embarked with him on a pleasure trip to New Orleans. Miss Louisa Walker and her two brothers joined them in Cincinnati. There was a good deal of musical ability in the party, and they made the trip pleasant, not only for themselves, but for the other passengers as well.

On the return trip, brother Dunning found it would be more profitable to reship his freight and passengers at Cincinnati and return from there to New Orleans. They were transferred to Captain Charles W. Batchelor's magnificent new boat, the peerless

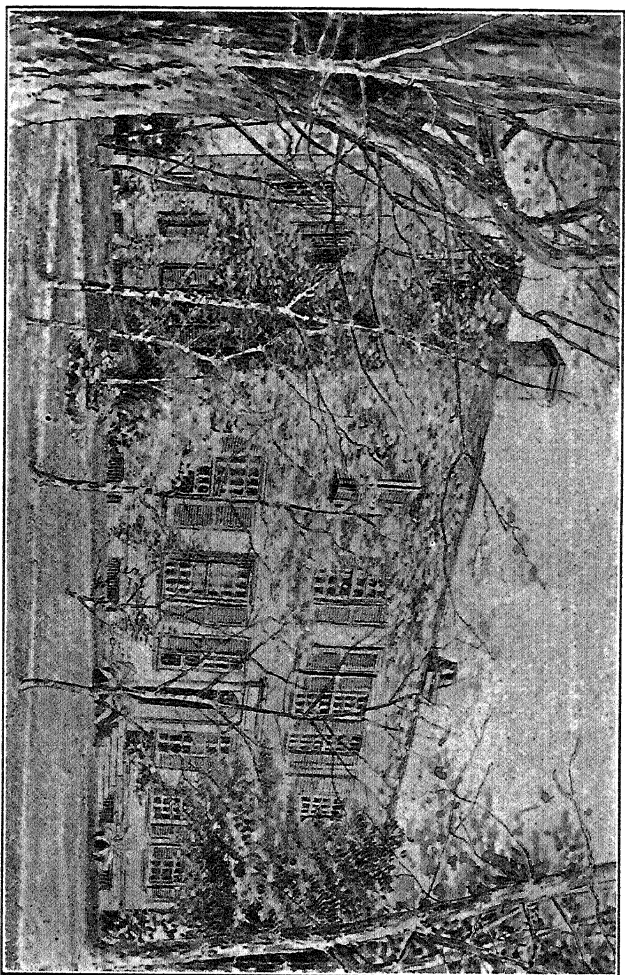
"Alleghany," and arrived in Pittsburgh on her. I had met them at Cincinnati and we were so well treated on the "Alleghany" that everybody on the boat joined in a complimentary card of thanks to Captain Batchelor. In those days the captains and other officers of the steamboats on the Western rivers regarded the passengers as their guests and treated them accordingly. These officers necessarily had to be gentlemen, or otherwise they could not continue long in the trade.

Wonderful men were these old-time river commanders, combinations of shrewd business management, daring seamanship, physical courage and manners fit for the most refined society. They are nearly all gone now. Before long the landing bell will sound and the gang-plank be run out for the last of them to take his place "among the silent sleepers."

As far as is known, with the possible exception of a visit at the home of Judge Rowan, in Bardstown, Kentucky, this trip to New Orleans is the only time that Stephen Foster, "the great Southern melodist," was ever in the South. The statement, frequently made, that on this voyage he observed many incidents of Southern life, which he afterwards utilized as points for poetical similes in his songs, is obviously untrue, because (as we have just pointed out) at this time he practically ceased to write about the South or the Southern negro.

I have been unable to ascertain exactly the date of the birth of Stephen Foster's only child, his daughter Marian. Robert P. Nevin says that she was twelve years old at the time of her father's death, which would indicate that she was born in the year of this trip, 1852.

The date of his first journey to New York is said to be "shortly after his marriage." If, as seems probable, he made only one trip during these years to New York, it must have been in 1853, as there is a letter to his brother Morrison written from New York in the summer of that year. It will be recalled that the letter from his sister Henrietta, making apparent reference to the unhappiness of his marriage and suggesting that he visit her in Youngstown, Ohio, was dated June 21st, 1853, a little over two weeks before the date of the New York letter. He may have gone to New York instead of to Youngstown.



The Old Kentucky Home

(Residence of Hon. John Rowan, near Bardstown, Kentucky)



Evidently he was still in Pittsburgh at the time his sister's letter was written, as she refers, in her invitation, to her house "well shaded by trees," as being "pleasanter than Pittsburgh this hot weather."

Morrison Foster says:

He had received very flattering offers from his publishers in New York, and strong inducements to make that city his home. He removed there and had every favorable prospect that a young man could hope for. He was paid a certain sum for every song he might choose to write, besides a royalty on the copies printed.

He went to house-keeping and liked New York very much. But after a year the old fondness for home and mother began to be too strong for him to overcome. One day he suddenly proposed to his wife that they return to Pittsburgh. He brought a dealer to the house, sold out everything in the way of furniture, and within twenty-four hours was on the road to the home of his father in Alleghany. He arrived late at night and was not expected. When he rang the bell, his mother was awakened and knew his footsteps on the porch. She arose immediately and went down herself to let him in. As she passed through the hall she called out, "Is that my dear son come back again?" Her voice so affected him that when she opened the door she found him sitting on the little porch-bench weeping like a child.

The date, circumstances and length of the sojourn in New York are shrouded in mystery.

Here is the only available bit of documentary evidence bearing on the subject:

New York, July 8, 1853.

My dear brother, [Morrison]

Your letter of the 6th is received. The vest arrived safely, I am glad you sent it. I wish you would send me Messrs. Firth, Pond & Co.'s note for \$125, which I gave you. In my anxiety to pay you I rather stinted myself, expecting to be able to live modestly at home, but circumstances have increased my expenses, as you know, since that time. They have just rendered my account, which is over \$500, and that for the dullest season in the year. So you see my prospects are good, but I dare not claim any money until these notes are paid. The full amount of my account current is passed to my credit and balance due to be claimed after that time. If you will let me have the note, I will take the first occasion to pay you. I am not living expensively and I hope it will not be long before I can pay you back the amount. I made it payable to your order, so if you send it, don't forget to endorse it.

I am getting along first rate, with plenty of work to keep me busy. Hippodrome no humbug, races there very exciting. Taylor's Saloon *great*. Sontag in opera with Salvi & Co. next week, Crystal Palace in a week. Fourth of July here good for nervous sick people I dare say. Cleared myself out of town, went over to Staten Island and

saw Vin Smith; Gillead and wife at Niagara, home next week. I am about bringing out a couple of good songs.

Love to all,

Your affectionate brother,

STEPHEN.

Nothing in this letter indicates how long he had been in New York and there is no mention of his wife and child. The sentence about expecting to "live modestly at home, but circumstances have increased my expenses, as you know, since that time," suggests two possibilities: he may have left his wife at home in Pittsburgh and gone to New York alone, or he and his wife may have separated in New York, thus making it necessary for him to maintain two establishments. Until some further testimony is forthcoming, this part of his life must remain a mystery. His widow told a reporter of "The Pittsburgh Leader" more than twenty years later that he wrote the song "Willie, We Have Missed You" (published in 1854) while they were "boarding on Sixth Avenue, New York."

Among the letters from other members of the family during these years there are only two references to Stephen aside from the letter from Henrietta, already quoted. One of these is in a letter from Dunning to William, dated "Steamer 'Norma,' Mississippi River near Vicksburg, March 3, 1854."

. . . . Have you heard anything from Stephen lately? It is a subject of much anxiety to me; notwithstanding his foolish and unaccountable course, I hope he will continue to make a comfortable living for himself.

Did the "foolish and unaccountable course" consist of persistence in writing songs for a living?

The other reference to Stephen is an affectionate one from his mother to Morrison, written from Philadelphia, where she was visiting relatives, on October 19th, 1854. After several pages of family news and social events in Philadelphia, she says: "Tell Stephen his letter was a great relief to me to know that all is well at home."—



Later: "Give my love to dear Stephen and tell him I wrote him a letter after I came here and directed it to New York."

We might conclude from these letters that Stephen had left his wife in Pittsburgh early in the summer of 1853 and had gone to New York alone, and that his return to Pittsburgh, after a year's residence in New York, took place during his mother's absence; but this would contradict Morrison's story of the sudden disposal of his household effects and of his mother's recognizing his step on the porch. These details are not of vital importance, but the incident proves how difficult it is to reconstruct a clear and consistent outline of Stephen Foster's life.

It would be interesting to know of Stephen Foster's attitude toward musical activities other than writing sentimental ballads and songs for negro minstrels, but there is no evidence on the subject. There was considerable musical life in New York during the years he spent in that city, but there is nothing to indicate that he came in touch with any of it aside from that of the "music halls."

The Philharmonic Orchestra had been organized in 1842, and was giving concerts during the year 1854 when Foster was in New York. There was also a choral organization, "The New York Harmonic Society," founded in 1850, which gave ambitious performances of *Elijah* and other oratorios. In these and other ways Foster had an opportunity to widen his musical horizon and to deepen his musical knowledge. It might be imagined that these experiences would have given him a new conception of the meaning and mission of music, but there is no indication that anything of the kind took place. There were plenty of musicians in New York, men of European training and culture, an acquaintance with whom would have been of inestimable value to Stephen Foster, but he does not seem to have sought

them out, nor they him. As far as achievement is concerned, his life was over. He had sung his song. During the remaining years of his life, he wrote many songs, particularly during the last two years, which were numerically the most productive of all, but he was content to repeat himself. He ventured into no new fields. He did not seek a deeper, more subtle expression or a larger musical vocabulary. Whatever the experiences of his later life, they are not in any way mirrored in his music, which remains at the end as simple and ingenuous as it was in the beginning.

A search through old scrap-books and the files of Pittsburgh newspapers of the 1850's fails to reveal any mention of his name, but gives an idea of the stage of cultural development of the Western city at this period. Jenny Lind gave a concert in Masonic Hall, Pittsburgh, in 1850, an occasion which was marred by the presence of a crowd of rowdies who shouted, whistled, and even indulged in throwing rocks. One rock penetrated into the dressing-room of the Swedish nightingale, who was so shocked that she refused to repeat her concert in Pittsburgh.

However, she returned the following year, and sang again on November 13th, 1851. On the latter occasion the crowd about the landing dock of the steamboat was so dense that it was feared she could not land. In the course of time, the familiar figure of P. T. Barnum appeared with a veiled lady on his arm. A way was made through the crowd and they were driven off to the Monongahela House. Then the real Jenny Lind slipped quietly off the boat and also went to the Monongahela House.

After her concert, which passed off without any exhibition of rowdyism, a statement to the contrary being indignantly denied in the papers the following day, the crowd in the hall and surrounding streets was so dense that she remained in the hall until midnight; then she

was spirited out the back door and through the fence, from which a number of rails had been removed; thence through various back alleys to the Monongahela House.

About this time a new Jardine organ of twenty-six stops was installed in Trinity Church.

Henry Kleber, a professional musician of Pittsburgh, who has already been mentioned as a possible teacher of Stephen Foster in his boyhood, was the hero of a *cause célèbre* in this same year. He was fined \$100 and costs for attacking with a cow-hide one Augustus Schaad, who had criticised him in a newspaper in connection with the concert of a Mme. Bornstein. Kleber had appeared as an "assisting artist" at the concert, and Schaad complained of his "presumptuous appearance" and his "self-admiration." The two met on the street shortly after this, and Schaad fled from the altercation which ensued, locking himself up in a near-by office. When he ventured forth again, the battle was renewed by Kleber's brother. The affair occupied columns in the various papers of the city for many days. The rival editors hurled denunciations at each other, after the style of the times, and indignant partisans of both sides wrote letters to the editors.

At Masonic Hall, in 1852, a concert was given by William Vincent Wallace, "Composer to the Imperial and Royal Theatres of London and Vienna." He played the violin and also appeared in piano duets with his wife, "Fräulein Helen Stopel." The favorite form of composition in those days seems to have been the "Grand Variation." Among the melodies selected by Wallace for elaboration at his Pittsburgh concert was "O Susanna."

A "Mendelssohn Quintette Club" was organized about 1850, and gave concerts for many seasons, their programs consisting of the works of Mozart, Schubert, Cherubini, Beethoven, and other masters, indicating a high degree of musical development on the part of both performers and audience.

Ole Bull gave a concert in Pittsburgh in 1855, and with him appeared Adelina Patti, as a "Child Prodigy" of eight. In the opinion of the Pittsburgh critics, she was too sophisticated for a child.

The following editorial is taken from the Pittsburgh "Evening Chronicle" of March 11th, 1853:

A hobby of society at the present day is to be music-mad, and the adulation and toddyism lavished upon every Piano Forte player of any talent is enough to disgust all sensible people with the instrument forever. From the language of the musical critiques of the Eastern press, one would suppose that there was nothing else worth living for in this life but music, and Piano Forte playing especially, and the musical world, following the key-note, look for the advent of each fresher greater Signor Pound-the-keys with a devotion and religious constancy unparalleled. He makes his advent and the whole town talks. Pound-the-keys young ladies practice barications (?) and musical young gentlemen walk, talk and sit Pound-the-keys fashion, and Pound-the-keys himself, well fed, well dressed and well puffed, for a few nights extorts from a Piano such extraordinary combinations of sounds, to the delight of the young ladies and gentlemen with exquisitely cultivated musical ears and to the misery of all who have not, who may have been deluded into attending. And Signor Pound-the-keys, for having rattled and splurged and hammered and tinkled and growled through three or four musical compositions with long-line names, fills his pockets for one night's work with as many dollars as three-fourths of the community earn in a year, while the mustached gentleman who assists him by quavering, quivering and shouting through three or four songs in as many different European languages, which is all gibberish to all of the audience with perhaps the exception of some dozen, pockets one-half as much more.

We think music is an art which deserves fostering and cultivating as much as any other art among our people, but we feel no ways backward in saying that from a common-sense point of view, the musical furore which pervades this country for wonderful piano playing and extraordinary effects of vocal powers in foreign languages, like what it is, is thorough humbug.

The Americans are a musical people, but we want to be educated up to the science and so long as nine-tenths of our people do not know even the A.B.C. of music, it is folly for them to listen to the most finished and eloquent combinations of it.

According to Robert P. Nevin, Stephen Foster enjoyed the friendship of artists of the highest distinction. "Herz, Sivori, Ole Bull and Thalberg were ready to approve his genius and to testify to their approval by the choice of his melodies about which to weave their witcheries of embellishment." Complimentary letters from men of literary note poured in upon him, among others one full

of generous encouragement from Washington Irving, dearly prized and carefully treasured until the day of his death. Similar missives reached him from overseas, from strangers and travellers in remote lands, and "he learned that while 'O Susanna' was the favorite song of the cottager on the Clyde, 'Uncle Ned' was known to the dweller among the pyramids."

Morrison Foster says that "from 1853 to 1860 Stephen lived at home" (home evidently being with his parents in Alleghany City). But this home was soon to be broken up and Stephen was to experience in reality those emotions of grief and sorrow which had so often been the burden of his song. His mother died suddenly in January, 1855, and his father, who had been an invalid for four years, survived her only a few months, his death occurring in July of the same year. This double loss must have been a terrible blow to a nature so affectionate and sensitive as Stephen's. His love for his mother amounted to adoration. This is one point at least on which there is no conflicting testimony. The family letters are sufficient evidence, were any needed, of the unusual affection that characterized the relations of the different members of the family.

In the notices of Mrs. Foster's death which appeared in the Pittsburgh papers, she is spoken of as "the mother of Stephen C. Foster, the celebrated song-writer," indicating that Stephen was accounted a celebrity. His name is mentioned before that of his father, twice Mayor of Alleghany City, or that of his brother, builder of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Early in the Spring of the following year (1856) another gap was made in the family circle by the death of Dunning Foster. The family Bible states that Morrison and Stephen were with him in Cincinnati at the time of his death.

During these years Stephen's musical productivity grew less and less. Five songs appeared in 1854, four

in 1855 and one each in 1856 and 1857. Several of these songs became immensely popular, although few of them are remembered to-day: "Ellen Bayne," "Hard Times Come Again No More," "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair," "Willie, We Have Missed You," and "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," belong to the past, along with the crinoline and the daguerreotype.

In many of the contemporary references to Stephen Foster, found in old newspapers and magazines, he is described as "the author and composer of 'Willie, We Have Missed You.'" The popularity of this song is difficult to account for, as it is one of his poorest. "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" and "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming" have more to recommend them. In the latter song he attempted a more elaborate construction than was his wont, but it cannot be said that he succeeded well in handling it, for the song is overly long and rather wandering.

Foster is said to have believed that the melody of the song "John Brown's Body" was taken from his "Ellen Bayne." The resemblance is certainly close enough to have justified this belief, although it is not sufficient in itself to be conclusive proof of plagiarism.

All of these songs were published by Firth, Pond & Co. There is a contract with this firm, dated December 21st, 1854. The first "Article" states that Foster is to receive 10% on all future vocal compositions, except the arrangements with guitar accompaniment; Articles Two and Three enumerate twenty-nine previously published compositions on which Foster is to receive 10% and 8% as specified. Other articles deal with instrumental compositions and arrangements for voice and guitar; accounts to be rendered every three months; Firth, Pond & Co. to own the copyright and proprietorship of the music and to attend to all business and to pay all expenses; the contract to annul all previous contracts, reference being made to contracts signed December 3rd,



# Over the Calm Lake Gliding Loon

dedicated to

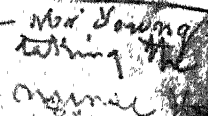
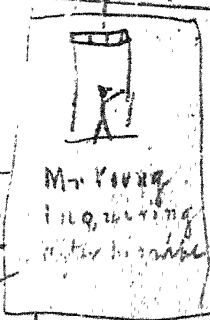
Amelia

13

Stephen L. Foster



Stephen and Amelia going to the 7 sisters.





1849 and May 5th, 1853, which henceforth become null and void. The signature of Stephen Foster has been removed from this contract and given to an autograph hunter, name unknown.

In 1854 was published "The Social Orchestra for Flute or Violin; A collection of popular melodies arranged as solos, duos, trios and quartets. By Stephen C. Foster." The "Introduction," dated "New York, January, 1854," says:

The publishers herewith offer to the public a collection of instrumental music, the melodies of which have been taken from among the most popular operatic and other music of the day, and arranged in an easy and correct manner, as Solos, Duets, Trios and Quartets, suitable for serenades, evenings at home, &c. Having long noticed the want of such a work, they have determined to issue one that will meet with general approbation, and have confided the task of selecting and arranging the melodies to a gentleman of acknowledged taste, and composer of some of the most popular airs ever written in this or any other country, as will be seen by reference to the name on the title page.

"The Social Orchestra" contained arrangements of seven of Foster's own songs, as well as an original schottische, four quadrilles, a "Village Festival Jig" and the "Old Folks Quadrille" in five parts. For his work in compiling and arranging "The Social Orchestra" Foster received \$150.

The following letter, which we publish unexpurgated, was written to his friend, William Hamilton:

Pittsburgh, Jan. 16th, 1857.

Dear Billy:

Your letter from Point Pleasant has been received and I am glad to know of the whereabouts of the great North American ballad singer. When can you promise to appear again before a Pittsburgh audience? Masonic Hall can be had now.

I have also had an engagement tendered me, but I declined. Kleber is going to give a concert and he has offered me the post of first anvil player in the "Anvil Chorus" from a new opera. I was unwilling to go through the course of training and dieting requisite for the undertaking and consequently declined. I understand that he has sent to Europe for a "first anvil." We have had another little political brush in the election of Mayor, but there was very little excitement. I have not yet received the Cincinnati Gazette and suppose that puff has not appeared. I will send you by this mail a copy of "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" if I can find a copy. Mit is now living with us. James Buchanan returned yester-

day from a long visit home. Mrs. Foster and Maggie are quite well. Your account of your appearance on the stage rather got them.

I am much obliged to you for that dog, "Rat Trap," as we call him on account of his well-known ferocity towards those animals. You must pardon me if I inform you that he is now with us no more. He continued to devour shoes, stockings, spools, the cat, and everything else that he could find lying around loose. At last we held a council of war and thought that we would put him in the yard, then we thought we wouldn't. We concluded at last to put him in the cellar. There he stayed for three days and howled all the time and would have howled till now if I had not let him out. I was afraid the neighbors would inform on us for keeping a nuisance. Solitary confinement did not agree with him. He lost his appetite. Then I gave him some garlic as you had instructed me. This gave him a sort of diarrhea and he got to Mit's room and defiled his bed, then he scattered Mit's dirty shirts over the floor, sprinkled his shoes and played hob generally. This performance seemed to bring him to his appetite, for the same evening he stole a whole beef steak off the kitchen table and swallowed it raw. We concluded this was too much to stand even from "friendship's offering," so I made up my mind to trade him off. John Little had a friend in Chicago who wanted just such a dog, so he gave me a very fine Scotch terrier eighteen months old for him. "Trap" is enjoying the lake breezes. *I am very much obliged to you for that dog.*

James Buchanan has just come in to see me, so here I will wind up.

Your friend,

STEPHEN C. FOSTER.

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Morrison Foster thus describes his brother:

"A stranger meeting him for the first time would have observed nothing striking in his appearance, but an acquaintance and a few moments' observation of and conversation with him would satisfy him that he was in the presence of a man of genius who, however modest in his demeanor, was accustomed to look deep into the thoughts and motives of men.

"In person he was slender, in height not over five feet seven inches. His figure was handsome; exceedingly well proportioned. His feet were small, as were his hands which were soft and delicate. His head was large and well proportioned. The features of his face were regular and striking. His nose was straight, inclined to aquiline, his nostrils full and dilated. His mouth was regular in form and the lips full. His most remarkable

features were his eyes. They were very dark and very large and lit up with unusual intelligence. His hair was dark, nearly black. The color of his eyes and hair he inherited from his mother, some of whose remote ancestors were Italian, though she was directly of English descent. In conversation he was very interesting, but more suggestive than argumentative. He was an excellent listener, though well informed on every current topic.

"It was difficult to get him to go into society at all. He had a great aversion to its shams and glitter, and preferred the realities of his home and the quiet of his study. When he was eighteen years old, a lady who was an old friend of the family, gave a large party and invited us all, and added, 'Tell Stephen to bring his flute with him.' That settled it so far as he was concerned. He would not go a step. He said, 'Tell Mrs. — I will send my flute if she desires it.' This dislike to being classed as a mere performer characterized him during his whole life, though he was not at all unsocial, and willingly sang or played for the enjoyment of himself or others, if the occasions were spontaneous and not set up. He, however, often sang in chorus with others, upon occasions of concerts for charitable purposes in Pittsburgh.

"While he never aspired to greatness as a performer, his voice was a true and pleasing baritone, sonorous and sympathetic. When he sang his own songs, which he did to a perfection no one else could attain, there was a plaintive sweetness in his tone and accent which sometimes drew tears from listeners' eyes.

"He would sit at home in the evening at the piano and improvise by the hour beautiful strains and harmonies which he did not preserve, but let them float away like fragrant flowers cast upon the flowing waters. Occasionally he would vary his occupation by singing in plaintive tones one of his own or other favorite songs. Of the latter class he much admired the 'May Queen' of

Tennyson, and the music composed by Mr. Dempster. His rendering of the verse,

To-night I saw the sun set,  
He set and left behind, etc.,

was truly pathetic. At times tears could be seen on his cheeks as he sang this song, so sensitive was his nature to the influence of true poetry combined with music. I usually sat near him on these occasions and listened quietly with profound delight. Sometimes he would whirl round on the piano stool and converse a few minutes with me, then resume his improvisations and his singing. Through the long years of the past those pleasing sounds and the recollection of those evenings at home still linger gratefully in my memory.

"He had certain favorites among his neighbors and friends whom he preferred to have assist him in singing the choruses of his songs while they were in course of preparation. These he chose because of the excellence of their voices and correct method of singing.

"He always, with rare exceptions, wrote the words as well as the music of his songs. He said the difficulty of harmonizing sounds with words rendered this necessary, though he would have often gladly dispensed with the writing of the words if he could.

"He delighted in playing accompaniments on the flute to the singing and playing on the piano of his sister or one of his lady friends. These little concerts were very delightful and gave the greatest pleasure to the household. As the song went on he would improvise, without the slightest hesitation or difficulty, the most beautiful variations upon the musical theme.

"Melodies appeared to dance through his brain continually. Often at night he would get out of bed, light a candle and jot down some notes of a melody on a piece of paper, then retire again to bed and to sleep.

"He was very simple in his taste, and no matter how well his income justified it, he shrank from everything like display. The simplest forms of food satisfied him. Indeed, he never appeared to care what was set before him on the table. If it appeased hunger it was all he cared for.

"His companions were seldom ever musicians. Outside of his own studies and performances he seemed to prefer to get away from music and musical topics. But he was very fond of the society of cultured people and men of genius in walks entirely different from his own."

From the same authority we quote several anecdotes illustrative of his character:

"This sensitive man had the nerve and courage of a lion physically. From earliest childhood he was noted for his courage, coolness and skill in the combats which continually occur among boys of the same town. As he grew up, no odds ever seemed to awe him. He was known as one who must be let alone, and was held in high respect accordingly.

"One night as he was returning home from Pittsburgh to Alleghany, he found at the end of the bridge two brutes abusing and beating a drunken man. He of course interfered, and fought them both rough and tumble all over the street. He managed to pick up a piece of board in the scramble, with which he beat one almost senseless and chased the other ingloriously from the field. A knife wound in the cheek, received in the encounter, left a scar which went with him to his grave.

"His sympathies were always with the lowly and the poor. Once on a stormy winter night a little girl, sent on an errand, was run over by a dray and killed. She had her head and face covered by a shawl to keep off the peltings of the storm and in crossing the street she ran under the horses' feet. Stephen was dressed and about going to an evening party when he learned of the tragedy. He went immediately to the house of the little

girl's father, who was a poor working man and a neighbor whom he esteemed. He gave up all thought of going to the party and remained all night with the dead child and her afflicted parents, endeavoring to afford the latter what comfort he could.

"On another occasion he had bought a small clock, run by springs, and set it on the mantelpiece of his chamber. The thing had a very loud tick, and there was no way of stopping it after it was once wound up. He could not get to sleep, for the clock with its monotonous clang drove slumber away. He wrapped a blanket around it and shut it up in a bureau drawer. But the dull throbbing sound which reached his ears from that retreat was, as he said, worse than the loud, open, defiant tick from the mantelpiece. He then lit a candle, and took it down to the dining room cupboard, but still he could hear it faintly. At length, in despair, he carried the ticking monster down to the cellar, in the profoundest depths of which he covered it with a washtub; and then returning to his room, carefully closed every door behind him and at last found rest."

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After three or four years of apathy, 1858 saw a renewal of energy in composition, four songs being published in that year, six in 1859 and eleven in 1860. With the exception of three negro songs in 1860, these compositions are all of a sentimental character, many of them sorrowing over the departed joys of the past. "Under the Willows She's Sleeping," "Sadly to My Heart Appealing," "Linda Has Departed," "Kiss Me, Dear Mother," "Poor Drooping Maiden," and "None Shall Weep a Tear for Me," are examples of these tearful ballads. Others are more cheerful: "Beautiful Child of Song," "Jenny's Coming o'er the Green," "Fairy Belle," "Parthenia to Ingomar," and "Thou Art the Queen of My Song."

There are no records of the sales of any of these songs, but their vogue was never great enough to have meant a very large income for their composer.

The three negro songs of 1860 are the last of this type that Foster wrote. "Glendy Burke" and "Don't Bet Your Money on the Shanghai" return to the original type of minstrel jingle. They are neither better nor worse than "Brudder Gum," "O Susanna," and the other products of his youth. The intervening years have not taken away his ability to produce nonsensical jingles and catchy rhythms, nor have they added to his power. "Old Black Joe" is one of the best of the Ethiopian songs, and has taken its place with "My Old Kentucky Home" and "The Old Folks at Home" among the songs of the people. Like them, its mood is one of gentle melancholy, of sorrow without bitterness. There is a wistful tenderness in the music.

Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay,  
Gone are my friends from the cotton fields away,  
Gone from the earth to a better land, I know,  
I hear their gentle voices calling, "Old Black Joe."

I'm coming, I'm coming, for my head is bending low,  
I hear their gentle voices calling, "Old Black Joe."

The following letters, all written to his brother Morrison, are the last of Stephen's letters in the family collection.

Pittsburgh, Nov. 11, 1858.

Dear Mit:

Mary Wick, Jane, Marian and I start to-morrow for Cincinnati, on Billy Hamilton's boat, the "Ida May." We all went to see Miss Davenport last night at the "old" theatre. We will stir old John McClelland up in Cincinnati, make the children sing and bring in Billy's bass voice. The trip will be recreation and variety for me. We had a nice duck supper with her the other evening. (Siss gets along very well since her mother's death.) She had plenty of jokes about Andy as usual.

Our old friend Bill Blakely died this morning. There is a very favorable notice of him in this evening's "Chronicle." I posted O'Neill on the matter. When I saw him last he (Blakely) said he wondered if he would ever see you again.

Your affectionate brother,

STEPHEN C. FOSTER.

"Jane" and "Marian" mentioned in this letter were his wife and little daughter.

They are mentioned again in a letter to Morrison written in the following summer:

Pittsburgh, August 15, 1859.

Dear Mit;

I went to Baden on Saturday and took Jane with me. I saw Mr. Deerdorf, who said that the crops had been poor, and dull payment, &c., &c. In short, he had no money. He had not received the scratch of a pen from you for a long time, that you had not demanded the money when it was due, &c. I asked him when he would be ready with the money; he said about the 1st of October. I told him to leave it with Henry. We took dinner and tea at Mr. Anderson's. He was not at home, but the girls were. Mrs. B., the youngest daughter, is very pretty and entertaining, being a combination of Mary Wick, Mary McClelland, Mrs. Mitchell, Mrs. Woods, etc. With much love to all,

Your affectionate brother,

S. C. FOSTER.

With the letters preserved by Morrison is a daguerreotype of Stephen, taken in 1859; attached to it is this note from Stephen:

Pittsburgh, June 15, 1859.

My dear brother Mit:

Yesterday my neighbor, who has the Daguerreotype establishment, invited me to have my picture taken. I think it is rather good and I send it to you, my dear brother.

Wife and daughter are mentioned again in this letter of the following spring:

Warren, Ohio, April 27th, 1860.

Dear Mit,

Please send me by return mail \$12. I have received from Firth, Pond & Co. a letter stating that they cannot advance me any more money till I send them the songs now due them, (about two as I make the calculation) as our present agreement is about expiring. They show a disposition to renew the agreement, but very properly require payment in music before any new arrangement. I have entered into an agreement with a new house for part of my music, but the terms are not entirely fixed, I cannot well draw on them now. I expect to be in Cleveland very soon on my way to New York, and will be able to settle with you. I require this amount for little washing bills, etc., which are, you know, the most perplexing. Please send the amount immediately, on receipt of this.

Jane and Marian are well, also Etty's family [his sister]. I am very well, but had as I supposed a slight touch of ague yesterday. I think to-day that it was only a false alarm. I have written two





Stephen C. Foster

(From the daguerreotype mentioned in the  
letter of June 15, 1859)



songs since I have been in Warren and have two under way, but do not feel inclined to send them off half made up.

Much love to Jessie,

Your affectionate brother,

STEPHEN.

Stephen seems to have been in the habit of drawing in advance from his publishers and living on the prospective royalties of the new songs. A month later he writes to his brother again for financial assistance, referring again to the contemplated trip to New York.

Warren, Ohio, May 31, 1860.

Dear Mit;

Herewith I send you a draft on Firth, Pond & Co. for \$50, which I wish you would hold for ten days, and if you can conveniently, please send me the amount by return mail. There will be no trouble about payment of draft. I have only one song to finish in the time mentioned. I desire to pay Mr. Schoenberger, the landlord, at the end of the month, as I engaged to do, and have told him that I would pay him when I would hear from Cleveland. I have received a very cheering letter yesterday from Firth, Pond & Co. and feel in good spirits generally.

Jesse Thornton arrived yesterday looking very well. We all did our best to give him a hearty welcome and you never saw such a happy family. He informs me that Jessie (yours) was in Cleveland, therefore I infer, that you have been in Pittsburgh since I saw you. I expect to start for New York before very long and hope to see you both.

Your affectionate brother,

STEPHEN C. FOSTER.

## VII

### TRAGEDY

The old box of letters which has been our principal link with the past, is nearly empty. It contains only three more references to Stephen. The first is a letter from a friend of Stephen's in New York, after an interval of four years:

New York City, January 12th, 1864.

Morrison Foster, Esq.,

Your brother Stephen I am sorry to inform you is lying in Bellevue Hospital in this city very sick. He desires me to ask you to send him some pecuniary assistance as his means are very low. If possible, he would like to see you in person.

Yours very truly,

GEORGE COOPER.

Dated two days later is this telegram:

176½ Bowery, New York City, N. Y.

Cleveland, Jan. 14, 1864, by telegraph from New York.

To Morrison Foster,

Stephen is dead. Come on.

GEORGE COOPER.

We have come to the end of the pitiful story. In some way Stephen Foster had fallen upon evil fortune and had made shipwreck of his life. More has been written about these last four years than of any other portion of his life, and yet very little is definitely known about them. Even during his lifetime, myths and legends began to accumulate about him, and after his death they multiplied rapidly. His brother Morrison was kept busy denying and refuting these tales, but they continued to appear from time to time, and apparently the end is not yet. The extraordinary popularity of his songs led many who had known him to indulge in fictitious "reminiscences." Evidently some of these writers were inspired by a desire to shine in some sort of reflected glory. The authorship of some of the Foster songs has been disputed, on the flimsiest of evidence, and much is made of the destitution and loneliness of his last days in

New York. I have examined carefully at least a score of these "reminiscences" published in various periodicals during the last fifty years, and have found little in any of them worthy of credence, while many of them are obviously imaginary.

One evidence of their falsity is the fact that a large number of them were copied obviously one from another, sometimes word for word. This is a striking characteristic of much of the literature about Foster. Not only are the same anecdotes repeated, but the very language of the originator of each story is perpetuated from year to year.

Each writer proclaims himself "Steve's only friend on earth," but if they could all have been assembled together, they would have made a goodly company. The unappreciated genius has been stock in trade for romancers the world over, and the temptation to make literary capital out of the friendless wanderer whose songs of home and mother had touched the world's heart was too strong to be resisted. "Loving music, he heard none; with a loving nature, he wandered the Bowery and saw no face he knew." "The most familiar sounds he heard were his own songs, the least familiar sight a friendly face." By these, and similar statements, have the journalists sought to bring out the "high lights" of his story.

A "reminiscence" which was reprinted frequently was written by George Birdseye. This article, with but slight changes in the wording, went on its way for many years from newspaper to magazine. Sometimes the reprint was acknowledged, usually it was put forth as something new. Several copies of the Birdseye story, clipped from various periodicals, are included in Morrison Foster's papers; on the margin of one of them is the comment, "This fellow is evidently a fraud. M.F."

There is pathos enough in the reality, without painting the picture in any darker colors than need be. Stephen's last days in New York were miserable enough in all

truth and his death one of the saddest of all those recorded in the old, old story of unhappy genius. "*Facilis descensus Averni.*" Stephen's downfall was probably the result of a gradual disintegration that had been going on through the years. If we shall never know the causes or exact circumstances, we know enough to awaken a sense of pity. Let us endeavor to avoid the highly colored pallet of the special writer on the one hand and the obliterating whitewash brush of the special pleader on the other.

Stephen went to New York in July, 1860. There is no evidence that he broke off relations with his family by doing so. William B. Foster, Jr., the "big brother" of his childhood, had died in Philadelphia a few months before, but his other brothers, Morrison and Henry, were still interested in him, as were his sisters. He was thirty-four years old when he went to New York and still young enough to have rescued his life from disaster, had he possessed the necessary strength of character.

Whether or not his wife and daughter accompanied him to New York in 1860, I do not know. One of the few reminiscences that bear any evidence of credibility was written for the "New York Clipper" in 1877 by John Mahon. He tells of meeting Foster in 1861, at Windust's Restaurant in Park Row, "a short man, who was very neatly dressed in a blue swallow-tailed coat, high silk hat, and-so-forth (the and-so-forth I forget). I must say I found him most social and conversational. I took him to my residence and introduced him to my family, and nearly all of his latest songs were composed upon my piano. At that time he boarded at No. 83 Greene Street, with his wife and little daughter Marian, who was about eight years old. The boarding-house was kept by a Mr. and Mrs. Stewart."

If Mrs. Foster was in New York in 1861, she must have left soon after, for she was not with him during his last days, nor at the time of his death.

Mahon tells of first hearing Foster's songs "O Sussanna" and "Uncle Ned" in 1852 in Patras, Greece, where he was clerk to a ship-chandler. The songs had been brought there by the family of an English sea-captain. Mahon later heard them played by the British army bands in Malta, and during the voyage from Malta to New York on the bark "Wildfire," he heard the sailors sing many of Foster's songs, especially "'Way Down Upon the Swanee River." He claims (and there is no reason to doubt his word) that he was Foster's friend from the time of their meeting in 1861 until the latter's death in 1864.

"In January, 1864," he writes, "I was compelled, in consequence of severe illness, to part with Foster and enter the pay-ward of Bellevue Hospital. On the 10th of that month I lost my wife, the mother of my children. On the 13th my friend died in the same hospital, and I knew not that he was even in there, the first intimation I had of his death being a short account of his funeral in the papers."

Mahon has something to say about the "Old Folks at Home" controversy:

One night, while sitting in my apartments, then at 311 Henry Street, my wife asked Stephen if he knew "The Old Folks at Home." "I should think I ought to," he replied, "for I got \$2,000 (not \$15,000) from Firth, Pond & Co. for it."

"Why, said I, 'how could that be? Was not E. P. Christy the author and composer?'"

"Oh no," replied he, laughing, "Christy paid me \$15 (not \$500) for allowing his name to appear as the author and composer. I did so on condition that after a certain time his name should be superseded by my own. One hundred thousand copies of the first edition were soon sold, for which I received a royalty of two cents per copy, and received \$1,400 for 'Willie, We Have Missed You' in the same way. Subsequently I sold out my royalties, and have now a contract to furnish Pond with twelve songs a year, for which I receive \$800 per annum, payable monthly at \$66.66, and I have permission to furnish six songs per annum to Lee & Walker of Philadelphia for \$400, so my income is now \$1200 per annum."

Many of Mahon's anecdotes are of doubtful value and he strains credulity to the breaking-point when he tells of Stephen stopping on the street to jot down musical

themes *on his thumb-nail with a pencil* (!); but many of his statements are quite plausible and are not contradicted by known facts, as are those of some of his contemporaries.

I have now come to a turn in the tide of poor Foster's life. I believe I have already stated that he wrote and composed most of his latest songs at my rooms, in Henry Street. One of these, and a most beautiful one, "Our Bright Summer Days Are Gone," he took to Pond, who refused it for some reason or other and it made him feel very despondent; for about this time Lee & Walker had ceased employing him in consequence of hard times. I was then "under the weather" myself, and I remember one evening when we were both pretty "hard up" indeed, neither of us had a cent, and I had a family besides, suddenly he sat down to the piano.

"John," he said, "I haven't time to write a new song, but I think I can write 'Our Bright Summer Days Are Gone' from memory."

"Take this round to Daly," he said, "and take what he will give you."

Mr. John J. Daly, now of 944 Eighth Avenue, was then my publisher, and was at 419 Grand Street. I took the song to Mr. Daly. He was proud to get a song from Foster. He tried it over and it was really beautiful. He offered a sum, which, though not a tithe of what Foster got in his better days, was still considered very handsome; and this "stone which the builders rejected" (Firth, Pond Co.) became very popular. His next was one of his finest, and was named "Our Willie Dear Is Dying"; next "Little Belle Blair"; and then followed "When the Bowl Goes Round," "A Thousand Miles from Home," and many others.

The song "Our Bright Summer Days Are Gone" was published by John J. Daly in 1861; so also was "Little Belle Blair." "Our Willie Dear" was published in the same year by Firth, Pond & Co., indicating that he had not broken entirely with his old publishers. But they no longer took his entire output, as they had done for the preceding nine years. The contract of December, 1854, in which Firth, Pond & Co. agreed to pay him 10% on all his future compositions, may have been followed by another in which they agreed to pay him a salary in return for twelve songs a year, as Mahon says. It had been ten years since he had written as many as twelve songs a year, but he might have agreed to do so, as it was easily within his power. The letters to Morison written from Warren, Ohio, in 1860, quoted in the preceding chapter, make such a supposition plausible,



as he speaks of not receiving any more money from Firth, Pond & Co. until he has delivered the songs due them. This would either indicate a regular salary, or a habit of drawing in advance on future royalties.

The salary contract with Lee & Walker of Philadelphia, to which Mahon refers, could not have amounted to much, as that firm appears on the records of the Copyright Office in Washington as the publisher of only one song by Stephen Foster, "‘Jenny’s Coming O’er the Green,’ Ballad, Written and Composed for the Clark’s School Visitor by Stephen C. Foster," which was copyrighted in 1860. Foster wrote three other songs for "Clark’s School Visitor," but the publishers’ name is given as "Daughaday & Hammond, Philadelphia." If he wrote extensively for the Philadelphia publishers, he must have done so under another name, which is not probable, as in these latter days his name was of more value than his music.

Among Morrison Foster’s papers there are numerous statements of royalty payments to Stephen’s widow and daughter made by Wm. A. Pond & Co. (the successor to Firth, Pond & Co.) on the sale of songs, up to very recent years, when the last copyright expired. There are no royalty statements from any other firm, and I have never seen anywhere a reference to royalties paid him by any other publisher. Judging from the evidence, it seems probable that in 1860 the contract with Firth, Pond & Co., upon which Stephen had been living for about nine years, in fact since the time when they took over his business affairs and undertook to publish all his compositions, was, for some reason, broken off, and he was compelled to take his songs to other publishers who paid him small sums outright for them. Perhaps the music publishing business was hard hit by the war, and the publishers were no doubt glad to get Foster’s songs for a small cash payment, while Stephen, without a regular income and with no business ability or experience,

was glad to part with them for whatever he could get. For most of them he did not receive more than \$25, which was all to the advantage of the publisher, as any song with his name on the title-page was almost certain to have some sale, and there was always the chance that it might run into hundreds of thousands, as many of the earlier ones had. If this theory is correct, it would account in a large measure for the poverty and distress of his last years, otherwise inexplicable.

There is nothing to indicate why the contract with Firth, Pond & Co. was discontinued, as the records of the firm for these years have not been preserved. The other publishers who had dealings with Foster in the three years preceding his death have either gone out of business or have destroyed their records.

Whatever the circumstances, Stephen was stirred to greater activity than he had ever displayed before. His most prolific year up to this time had been his first as a professional song-writer, 1850, when he produced fifteen songs; his poorest years were 1856 and 1857, when he wrote only two songs, one each year. The years 1858 and 1859 each brought forth six; in 1860 there are eleven; thirteen in 1861, sixteen in 1862, and 1863, the last year of his life, was the most productive of all, with forty-eight. Eleven songs were published posthumously in 1864, the year of his death, three in 1865, and one each in 1866 and 1870.

Numerous as they are, if Stephen Foster had written nothing but these songs of his later years, his name would have been forgotten long ago. Most of them are extremely commonplace, and obviously are pot-boilers. Stephen had never mastered sufficiently the technic of composition to be able to produce interesting music on demand, and his vocabulary was so small that of necessity he repeated himself over and over again. He could usually find a melody of some sort without much trouble, but after a bar or two they are all apt to follow the same

pattern. Many of his melodic ideas are worthy of better treatment, had he been able to handle them with greater skill. But even in these miserable days when he was drawing deeper and deeper into the shadow, now and then the pure ray of his early inspiration shines out in a melody as fresh and innocent as the clear voice of a child. Such are "Little Belle Blair" and "Nell and I" (1861), and "Jenny June" and "Katy Bell" (1863).

A few of the songs refer to the war, but they are among the poorest and were evidently produced in a vain effort to find the way to the public purse, rather than to the public heart.

In 1863 Stephen wrote twenty-nine songs for "The Atheneum Collection of Hymns and Tunes for Church and Sunday School Use," published by Horace Waters. Most of these "hymns" are feeble little tunes, undistinguished by either beauty or force of character. As a writer of Sunday-School hymns, Stephen Foster was not superior to his contemporaries whose very names are now forgotten. Several songs in the Atheneum Collection were reprinted later in similar volumes, and some of his best-known melodies were fitted to sacred (?) words. "Hard Times Come Again No More" was converted to "Sorrow Shall Come Again No More"; a Sunday-School hymn-book published in 1903 has a song, "Hear the Gentle Voice of Jesus," set to Foster's "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," and another hymn, "Our Shepherd True," set to "Swanee River." Another book has the melody of "Old Black Joe" with the words "Long from my heart the world and all its charms."

During the early part of his life in New York, Stephen received a visit from his former sweetheart, Susan Pentland, to whom he had dedicated his first published song, "Open Thy Lattice, Love." She was now Mrs. Robinson, and her son, John W. Robinson of Pittsburgh, remembers the trip to New York with his parents and the meeting with Stephen Foster. The exact date is

uncertain, but Mr. Robinson believes that it was just before the outbreak of the war, probably late in 1860, or early in 1861. They stopped at the St. Nicholas Hotel, on Broadway, near Spring Street, and the street, jammed with busses, made a deep impression on the small boy. He remembers that his father hunted up Stephen and brought him to dinner at the hotel and that they had a merry time. After dinner they all went to Laura Keen's Theatre. Mr. Robinson is under the impression that Stephen was making a living as a music-teacher. He remembers him as bright and entertaining, and in his recollection of the event there is no hint of the misery and destitution that afterward overtook Stephen.

In 1888 the New York "Evening Sun" published a long interview with "a Pittsburgh gentleman who is about to write a life of Stephen C. Foster, the author of 'Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming,' 'Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground,' 'Old Dog Tray,' the incomparable 'Old Folks at Home,' which has brought the tears to thousands of eyes when sung by Mme. Christine Nilsson and other divas equally celebrated, and many other melodies which still ring in the ears of millions of lovers of harmony in this and other countries." Other references to projected biographies of Stephen Foster are to be found, but apparently none of them was ever brought to completion.

All of these reminiscences emphasize his drunkenness and destitution. If they are to be believed, he had sunk to the lowest depths of disreputable degradation. It is undoubtedly true that the alcoholic habit had laid hold on Stephen too tightly ever to be thrown off. It is spoken of by Robert P. Nevin, in his friendly and sympathetic memoir published in 1867:

His disposition was truly amiable, although from the tax imposed by close application to study, liable to fits of fretfulness and scepticism. Occasional and transient as they were, they told with distressing effect upon his temper. In the same unfortunate direction was the tendency of habit grown insidiously upon him, a habit

against which, as no one better than the writer knows, he wrestled with earnestness indescribable, resorting to all remedial expedients, which professional skill or his own experience could suggest, but never entirely delivering himself from its damning control.

In protesting against the story by Birdseye, which laid special stress on this point, Morrison Foster wrote to an editor:

I can see no possible good to be attained by publishing it. If my brother had been distinguished as an orator, an actor, appearing before the public in person, references to the only failing he ever had might perhaps be relevant, but the public knew not *him* but only of him, his poetry and music being the only visible sign that such a being really existed at all; reference to certain peculiarities is not only out of place, but is a cruel tearing open of old wounds, which the grave should close forever.

But this "peculiarity" made good "copy"; and the story has been told so often that to many minds the name of Stephen Foster, like that of Edgar Allan Poe, is a synonym of drunkenness. The world has always demanded dramatic contrasts in its stories. It more than half expects its geniuses to live in garrets and hovels, or if need be, in a Bowery saloon. To the common mind a genius is a strange being, half god and half devil, who in a moment of frenzy dashes off a bit of immortality, and who atones for the possession of superior gifts by exhibiting more than compensatory defects. Particularly, the musical genius, by reason of the abstract, almost occult, manner of his expression, is a special victim of this popular appetite for drama. Mozart and Schubert in their poverty, Beethoven in his deafness, the blind Handel and the drunken Stephen Foster will always have their place in the world's story-book. In the case of Foster it is unfortunate that the emphasis must be placed so often on this unhappy trait, which his family would so gladly have forgiven and forgotten; but so long as human nature loves garish colors in its picture-book, it is not likely to be otherwise. "Drunken" he may have been in these last sad days; "dissolute" he never was. The least sympathetic of his memorialists give him credit for

the purity of his soul and the manner of his life. He impressed all who met him with the delicacy and sensibility of his nature. A more robust character, a stronger will, might have taken a firmer grip on life and shaken off the benumbing influence of the weakness that ruined his career, but on the other hand probably such a temperament could not have produced "Swanee River." Sensitive, introspective, given to brooding rather than to action, Stephen paid the penalty of his temperament; the world is richer for his weakness.

Out of the incomplete and somewhat conflicting testimony on the subject, one fact emerges free from doubt and conjecture; Stephen Foster was admitted to Ward 11, in Bellevue Hospital, January 10, 1864, and died there on January 13th. This was a charity ward, the last port of many of the city's human derelicts. Stephen Foster's name is entered on the register as "laborer," evidently because he was poorly dressed and unidentified as belonging to any particular occupation.

So far as the record of the family letters is concerned, the end of Stephen's life is told by the letter and telegram from George Cooper, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and by a receipt given to Morrison Foster by the Warden of the hospital:

Ward 11, Stephen Foster, Died January 13th;  
Coat, pants, vest, hat, shoes, overcoat, January 10, 1864,  
Received of Mr. Foster ten shillings charge for Stephen C.  
Foster, while in hospital, Jan. 16, 1864. William E. White,  
Warden, Bellevue Hospital.

One of the most interesting events connected with the writing of this biography was the discovery that George Cooper, the friend who notified Morrison Foster of his brother's illness and death, is still living; Mr. Cooper is able to furnish some accurate and first-hand information with regard to Stephen's last days, and to dispose of many of the legends and faulty reminiscences which have flourished of late years. His collaboration with Stephen

Foster was the beginning of a long and very successful career as a writer of song lyrics, a career that brought him into intimate contact with the course of American musical composition during the past fifty years. His name appears on the list of first editions of Foster's songs, published by the Library of Congress, as the author of the words of eighteen of the songs. One of them is erroneously attributed to "Henry" Cooper, due to a typographical error on the title-page of the first edition.

Shortly after my first interview with Mr. Cooper, I had the pleasure of meeting and talking with another person who had known Stephen Foster—Mrs. Parkhurst Duer, a lady now living in Brooklyn, who was at the time of Foster's death employed in the music store of Horace Waters. The interview which I had with her was recently published, in substantially the same form in "The Etude," from which the following quotation is made:

I shall never forget the day I met him. I was engaged in a large music publishing house on Broadway, New York City, leading a very busy life, although but twenty-one years of age. Every day I met teachers and composers, and was ever hoping that Stephen Foster would appear. I had heard that he was living in New York, but had never known anything about his life; yet his songs had created within me a feeling of reverence for the man, and I longed to see him. One day I was speaking with the clerks when the door opened, and a poorly dressed, very dejected looking man came in, and leaned against the counter near the door. I noticed he looked ill and weak. No one spoke to him. A clerk laughed and said:

"Steve looks down and out."

Then they all laughed, and the poor man saw them laughing at him. I said to myself, "Who can Steve be?" It seemed to me, my heart stood still. I asked, "Who is that man?"

"Stephen Foster," the clerk replied. "He is only a vagabond, don't go near him."

"Yes, I will go near him, that man needs a friend," was my reply.

I was terribly shocked. Forcing back the tears, I waited for that lump in the throat which prevents speech, to clear away. I walked over to him, put out my hand, and asked, "Is this Mr. Foster?"

He took my hand and replied:

"Yes, the wreck of Stephen Collins Foster."

"Oh, no," I answered, "not a wreck, but whatever you call yourself, I feel it an honor to take by the hand the author of 'Old Folks

at Home.' I am glad to know you." As I spoke, the tears came to his eyes, and he said:

"Pardon my tears, young lady, you have spoken the first kind words I have heard in a long time. God bless you." I gave him both hands, saying:

"They will not be the last." I asked him to sit at my desk awhile, and get acquainted. He seemed pleased, but apologized for his appearance. He was assured it was not his dress, but Mr. Foster I wanted to see. I judged him to be about forty-five years of age, but the lines of care upon his face, and the stamp of disease, gave him that appearance. (He was actually only thirty-seven.) We had a long conversation.

When this first visit was ended, Mr. Foster thanked me for my interest in him, and said it had done him a world of good to have some one to talk with. He had no one to call a friend. I asked him to let me be a friend, and perhaps in my humble way, I might be of service to him. I said if he would bring me his manuscript songs that he had not been able to write out, I would do the work for him at his dictation. He was very grateful, and from that time until he died I was permitted to be his helper.

When he brought me his rude sketches, written on wrapping paper, picked up in a grocery store, and he told me he wrote them while sitting upon a box or barrel, I knew he had no home. I asked him if he had a room, he said:

"No, I do not write much, as I have no material or conveniences." He then told me that he slept in the cellar room of a little house owned by an old couple, down in Elizabeth Street, in the "Five Points," who knew who he was, and charged him nothing. He said he was comfortable, so I suppose he had a bed.

One day Mr. Foster came to my desk with the sketch of a song entitled "When Old Friends Were Here." He remarked it might be his last song, and that would be the end of "Foster."

As he prepared to leave the store, it was growing dark, and as he appeared weaker than usual, I offered to go with him to the street. As I helped him into the stage, he said very earnestly, "You are my only friend," and as the door closed he waved his hand, and the last words I heard were "God bless you." I am sure they were his last words on earth.

The next day he did not call for his song, but the evening paper appeared with a great headline, "Stephen C. Foster, dead." "At eleven o'clock last night" (the paper stated) "a policeman heard groans, in the cellar of a house he was passing, and upon entering found a man bleeding to death, from a gash in the throat. He had evidently risen from his bed for some water, and had fallen over a broken pitcher. He was taken to Bellevue Hospital in an unconscious condition, and passed away at one o'clock. He was identified by a manuscript in his pocket with his name upon it. Relatives in Pennsylvania claimed the remains." Nothing more concerning his death was published.

Stephen Foster may have at one time lived in the cellar room of a house on Elizabeth Street, but Mrs. Duer is mistaken in supposing that the accident which led to his death took place there.



The "wrapping paper, picked up in a grocery store," is a feature of all Foster reminiscences. It has impressed itself upon the history of American music in a manner positively uncanny. "Old Dog Tray" is alleged to have been written in the middle of the night on an old piece of brown wrapping paper which happened to be handy. Various other of the songs are reputed to have been jotted down on this justly famous sheet; in fact, no biography of Stephen Foster can be considered complete without brown wrapping paper. One version even goes so far as to have the wrapping paper stained with grease from the articles of food which it once enclosed. Another biographer uses the wrapping paper as a starting-point from which to deduce the wholly incorrect supposition that Stephen was a clerk in a grocery store, and that during the day he waited upon customers from behind a counter, while at night, when all around was still, he sat in his lonely attic and dreamed of his absent loved ones, the while he consigned his immortal melodies to brown wrapping paper by the flickering light of a single candle. Just how important a part brown wrapping paper played in Stephen's life we can never know, but it has become so ineradicably connected with his memory that any attempt to dissociate it at this time would be sheer cruelty. All honor to its cherished memory!

George Cooper tells of meeting Stephen Foster in the back-room of a disreputable grocery on the corner of Hester and Christie Streets. According to the custom of that time, the front of the shop was devoted to the sale of groceries, but back of a partition was a small room which was used as a saloon, and here Stephen spent much of his time. Mr. Cooper describes him as a man utterly careless of his appearance, having apparently lost the incentive power of self-respect. He lived at 15 Bowery, in a cheap lodging-house where he paid 25 cents a night. He told Mr. Cooper that he had had a regular income of \$1,500.00 a year from his songs, and

Mr. Cooper is under the impression that, although in destitution himself, he was at this time supporting his wife and daughter in Pittsburgh. He was very fond of the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, and recited long extracts from it with thrilling effect.

Young Mr. Cooper was something of a poet, and the two formed a partnership. The first of the songs of which Cooper wrote the words was published in 1863 and in less than a year they wrote and published eighteen. These songs they sold for whatever they could get for them, which was never much. The song "Willie Has Gone to the War" was written one morning, and after it was finished, Stephen rolled it up and tucking it under his arm, said, "Well, where shall we put this one?" Cooper says that he remembers it was a cold, raw, winter day, snow falling drearily, and the pavements covered with slush. Stephen's shoes had holes in them and he had no overcoat, but he seemed oblivious to discomfort and misery. As the author and composer proceeded up Broadway, they passed Wood's Music Hall, and the proprietor, standing in the lobby, hailed them as they passed with the question, "What have you got there, Steve?" The song was sold then and there, Wood paying \$10 cash, \$15 more to be paid at the box-office that evening.

Stephen called Cooper "the left wing of the song factory," and most of their songs were written and sold in very much the same manner as "Willie Has Gone to the War." They sold all of their songs for cash, receiving no royalties on any of them. This was not important to Cooper, who was a youth of about twenty, living at home with his parents, and song-writing was something of a pastime for him, but to Stephen, entirely dependent upon his songs for livelihood, it meant destitution. His clothes were poor and sadly worn, a fact to which he seemed totally indifferent. Cooper says that on several occasions friends gave him clothes, but usually Stephen





STEPHEN FOSTER AND GEORGE COOPER

After an ambrotype taken in New York in 1863

(From the collection of Frederick M. Steele)

appeared again after a few days in his ragged suit and glazed cap. This cap seems to have been an outstanding feature of his appearance in these last days, as it is mentioned by several biographers.

This sorry picture of Stephen's disreputable appearance is somewhat belied by the ambrotype of Stephen and George Cooper, taken in 1863, only a few months before his death. True, his good clothes may have been assumed for that occasion only, but the picture is hardly that of a man in the last stages of alcoholism. Unfortunately the ambrotype is not a good one, and both the faces are blurred, but the likeness of Stephen is distinct enough to give the lie to those of his biographers who describe his face as that of Silenus.

Although he drank constantly, Cooper says that Stephen was never intoxicated. He was indifferent to food, often making a meal of apples or turnips from the grocery shop, peeling them with a large pocket-knife. The "rum" he drank was concocted by the barkeeper from French spirits and brown sugar, and was kept in a keg.

He wrote with great facility and without the aid of a piano. If no music-paper was handy, he would take whatever paper he could find, and, ruling the lines on it, proceed without hesitation to write. He seemed never at a loss for a melody, and the simple accompaniment caused him no trouble. These first drafts were taken out and sold to a publisher or theatre manager, practically without correction. To this habit is evidently due the "brown wrapping paper" legend, as Cooper says that he would use brown wrapping paper if he couldn't find anything else.

George Cooper enlisted in the 22nd New York Regiment in 1862, and was at the front during a large part of this year. He was with the same regiment in 1863, serving in the Gettysburg campaign, returning to New York upon the disbanding of the regiment on July 24th, 1863.

From this time until Stephen's death, a few months later, they continued their collaboration. Cooper's story of Stephen's death, which is undoubtedly the true one, is as follows:

"Early one winter morning I received a message saying that my friend had met with an accident; I dressed hurriedly and went to 15 Bowery, the lodging-house where Stephen lived, and found him lying on the floor in the hall, blood oozing from a cut in his throat and with a bad bruise on his forehead. Steve never wore any night-clothes and he lay there on the floor, naked, and suffering horribly. He had wonderful big brown eyes and they looked up at me with an appeal I can never forget. He whispered, 'I'm done for,' and begged for a drink, but before I could get it for him, the doctor who had been sent for arrived and forbade it. He started to sew up the gash in Steve's throat, and I was horrified to observe that he was using black thread. 'Haven't you any white thread,' I asked, and he said no, he had picked up the first thing he could find. I decided the doctor was not much good and I went down stairs and got Steve a big drink of rum, which I gave him and which seemed to help him a lot. We put his clothes on him and took him to the hospital. In addition to the cut on his throat and the bruise on his forehead, he was suffering from a bad burn on his thigh, caused by the overturning of a spirit lamp used to boil water. This had happened several days before, and he had said nothing about it, nor done anything for it. All the time we were caring for him, he seemed terribly weak and his eyelids kept fluttering. I shall never forget it.

"I went back again to the hospital to see him, and he said nothing had been done for him, and he couldn't eat the food they brought him. When I went back again the next day they said 'Your friend is dead.' His body had been sent down into the morgue, among the nameless dead. I went down to look for it. There was an old

man sitting there, smoking a pipe. I told him what I wanted and he said 'Go look for him.' I went around peering into the coffins, until I found Steve's body. It was taken care of by Winterbottom, the undertaker, in Broome Street, and removed from Bellevue. The next day his brother Morrison, and Steve's widow, arrived. They stayed at the St. Nicholas Hotel. When Mrs. Foster entered the room where Steve's body was lying, she fell on her knees before it, and remained for a long time."

The body was sent back to Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Adams Express Company refusing any remuneration for their services.

The train met with an accident at a point about five miles above Tyrone, where a bridge across the Little Juniata gave way, dropping two passenger coaches into the stream; but the baggage car, containing Stephen's body, was not affected by the wreck. The funeral took place in Trinity Church, Pittsburgh, January 21st, 1864. The music was in charge of Henry Kleber, and according to the Pittsburgh 'Commercial' of January 22nd:

Rev. Swope, Rector of Trinity Church, assisted by Dr. Page of Christ Church, Alleghany, conducted the services. There was a large attendance at the church, a goodly number of which followed the remains to their last resting place on earth. After a chant by the choir, the Episcopal service was read by Dr. Page. The hymn commencing,

Vital spark of heavenly flame,  
Quit, oh quit this mortal frame!

was sung by Mr. H. Kleber, to an air from the Oratorio, "Joseph and His Brethren." After which the remains were placed in the hearse and the cortege moved off. At the cemetery gate the remains were met by the Citizen's Brass Band, which performed, "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming" and "The Old Folks at Home," which to our mind, were sadly and impressively appropriate. The spot selected for his final sleep is in the most lovely part of the cemetery, and alongside of his father and mother.

There were no "great headlines in the papers," although several of the newspapers published obituary notices, notably the New York "Evening Post," which

compared him to Donizetti, as "a finder of many melodies," and the Philadelphia "Age." It is said that the Pittsburgh and Alleghany banks and schools were closed on the day of the funeral, although no reference to this is made in the accounts of the funeral published the next day in the Pittsburgh papers.

Stephen Foster's grave in Alleghany Cemetery is marked by a simple marble stone, on which are the words:

Stephen C. Foster,  
of Pittsburgh.  
Born July 4, 1826,  
Died January 13, 1864.





The Grave of Stephen C. Foster



## VIII

### THE COMPOSER

As a composer, Stephen Foster is a paradox. The wonder is that anyone who could write so well, could at the same time write so poorly. Was he a man of mediocre talent, who stumbled almost by accident upon a few nuggets of pure gold in the midst of much of little worth, or was he endowed with a great gift which remained for the most part mute and found expression only in a few brief moments of song?

He had practically no constructive ability. So far as the first impulse of his inspiration could carry him, he went, but no farther. Judged by the standards of musical composition, nearly all of his one-hundred and seventy or more songs are on the same level. These songs were written throughout a period of about twenty years, during which time he neither gained nor lost in the power of expression. His death, at thirty-seven, found him as a composer just about where he had been at the beginning of his career. Both melody and harmony are of the utmost simplicity. He could neither develop a melody nor vary his harmony. His melodies repeat themselves monotonously, and he was content with a few simple chords and modulations. And yet when his inspiration is of so pure and exalted a nature as it is in "The Old Kentucky Home," or "The Old Folks at Home," the very limitations of his power become virtues, resulting in a simplicity and directness of utterance which no amount of erudition and sophistication could have equalled in sincerity and potency. He put the best of himself into the composition of these songs, and it is because they are the honest expression of real emotion that they found their way directly and at once to the world's heart.

In order to understand Foster's limitations as a musician, it is necessary to realize the conditions of his early environment. For the proper development of artistic expression, an old and well established civilization is necessary. This is especially true of the development of the musician, i. e., the composer, the man who produces music. The other arts, literature, painting, sculpture, and the drama, are more or less imitative and drawn directly from life and experience, but music is esoteric in its nature, and, for its proper expression, demands not only the power and impulse to create, but also initiation into the forms and formulæ of the art itself. This esoteric quality distinguishes music from all other activities of the human spirit, even religious aspiration, which it most closely resembles.\*

It is this quality also which explains the fact that, in all the cycles of civilization, music has always been the last of the arts to reach its full development. Music, as we now know it, did not find itself until the beginning of the seventeenth century, although for the majority, even those most musically endowed, there is little of vital interest or meaning prior to Johann Sebastian Bach, nearly one hundred years later. One has only to glance at the achievements at this period in other arts to realize how long music had been a-borning. That American composers lag behind their European contemporaries both in numbers and in the quality of their work, does not argue an inferior natural musical endowment, nor lack of aspiration, but merely means that an American has farther to go to reach the goal than a European.

Perhaps no one can fully realize this important truth who has not lived, at least for a time, in a primitive community. A log-cabin may produce an Abraham Lincoln, but it can never produce a Mozart or a Beethoven. The American people are drawing farther and farther away from the log-cabin, but a study of the comparative stages

\* Cf. Richard Wagner's "Beethoven."

of musical development of the older Atlantic states and those of the Middle West, the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Coast, will prove that the principle is still effective. A great composer may yet "come out of the West," but the degree of his greatness will depend very largely upon just how early in his life he "comes out."

The amount of musical culture to be found in Pittsburgh during the formative years of Stephen's boyhood was negligible. Pianos, and, indeed, all musical instruments, were extremely rare west of the Alleghany Mountains in the 1830's; and it is doubtful if Stephen heard much music of any kind during these early years. Even more important than this, however, was the prevailing attitude toward music. As we have indicated, the real turning-point of his career was in his boyhood and youth, before he had made more than a few efforts at musical composition. In the early development of a new community, every effort of the people is devoted toward material progress. Forests must be razed, roads and houses built, the ground tilled and the crops gathered and utilized. In most of our American communities, the earliest settlers at the first possible opportunity laid the foundations of education and began training the intellect of the younger generation. Artistic culture, which may be called the third stage of development, must of necessity remain for a long time dormant.

Western Pennsylvania, during Stephen Foster's boyhood, was making rapid progress in the evolution of its materialistic civilization, and had already entered upon the pursuit of intellectual culture, but the cultivation of art, in its manifold forms, had not even been begun. The real business of life, to these people, and to most Americans even in this present day, consisted of farming, manufacturing or trading; in other words, the production and manipulation of material. Certain other pursuits requiring more or less cultivation of the mind, such as law (and its corollary "politics"), medicine and the sciences,

contributing as they do toward material prosperity and well-being, were also held in esteem. Any adult male human being who could not or would not make himself of value to the community in any of these lines was worse than useless. Music, water-color painting and embroidery were pleasing accomplishments for young ladies whose social position warranted their indulgence in such unproductive pastimes. It was known that there had been artists in times past, for their names are to be read in history; there were known to be certain opera singers and others who devoted their lives to musical activity, but they were like beings from another planet, always "foreigners," "Signor" or "Madame," a little to be pitied and a little to be scorned. This attitude of mind has not entirely vanished from the land even in this Year of Grace.

Stephen Foster's career is a good example of what happens when a musical soul is placed in an unmusical environment. Nothing ever takes the place of instinctive and intuitive culture, and this is absorbed unconsciously during the early years of life. No amount of study and industry can develop to its fullest possibilities the talent of one whose childhood is barren of music. Neither poverty, nor the material conditions surrounding his early life, thwarted the development of Stephen Foster's genius. The answer to the riddle is to be found in the mental atmosphere in which he found himself.

There is no evidence that Stephen Foster ever attempted to overcome the deficiencies of his early musical education. On the contrary, he was either content with his achievements or, feeling that the struggle was hopeless, lacked the courage to begin it.

It may be seriously doubted whether greater technical facility would have improved his music or achieved for him a greater name in history. The general average of his work might have been higher, but his best songs might have lost something of the sincerity and naïve charm

which are their greatest attribute. Limited as it was, his technical equipment was exactly suited to the production of such a song as "The Old Folks at Home."

It would be futile to compare him with any of the great men of music. The circumstances of his life, the environments of his mind, were so totally different from those surrounding any of the acknowledged masters of the Art, that any speculations of this kind would be idle. He bears some resemblance to Schubert. Who can say what would have been the sum of Franz Schubert's achievements had he been born in Pittsburgh in 1826?

Foster's melodies display a surprising vigor; they abound in wide intervals, the initial phrase frequently extending over an octave, a characteristic said to be indicative of an active temperament and an energetic mind. Intervals of a fourth, a fifth and a sixth are quite common, while the leap of an octave occurs often enough to be noted as a characteristic. Among the melodies in which the octave leap occurs are those of the songs "Uncle Ned," "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," "The Old Folks at Home," "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," "Willie Has Gone to the War," "Nell and I," and the Schubertian "Open Thy Lattice, Love," written at sixteen.

The repetitiousness of Foster's melodies is such that one cannot fail to wonder that they exert such an influence upon the listener as they do. Even among the folk-songs and the simple tunes to which they can be compared, few are as rudimentary as they. For example, let us analyze "The Old Folks at Home," which, for widespread popularity, is the most successful of his songs. The verse is composed of a four-bar phrase which is repeated four times, twice with a semi-cadence (dominant seventh), and twice with a tonic cadence. The beginning of the chorus presents a new phrase of four measures, answered by the verse-phrase with the complete cadence. The song is provided with a "prelude" and "postlude"

for piano which are nothing but duplicates, an octave higher, of the first two lines of the verse. In other words, we have a ten-line musical verse of which nine lines are identical. The musical material from which the song is made proves to be two four-measure phrases. The harmonic texture is as naïve as the melody. There are no modulations whatever, and only the three primary chords are employed, tonic, dominant (seventh) and subdominant, all of which appear in the root position, except one subdominant chord which is in a second inversion. This is, indeed, music in "words of one syllable," and it is a striking evidence of the beauty and potency of Foster's inspiration that his songs have won the affection of the musically sophisticated, as well as of the unlearned.

"Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground" is fashioned in the same manner as "The Old Folks at Home." The four-line verse is made of one phrase, occurring twice with dominant and twice with tonic ending; the chorus of two lines introduces one new phrase and repeats the original one. There are no modulations, only three chords, all in the root position except a single second inversion of the subdominant. The melodic outline of "My Old Kentucky Home" is on the same pattern, although it contains one modulation to the key of the dominant, and there are several chord inversions. The formula is varied slightly in "Old Black Joe," the fourth line of the verse being new material; the familiar modulation to the key of the dominant occurs in this song also. Foster seldom uses any other modulation, although there are a few instances when the key of the subdominant is used, and a few changes from major to relative minor, and vice versa. He made sparing use of the secondary chords, one of the most successful instances of their employment being in the song "Ah, May the Red Rose Live Away."

Of late years there has been a movement of protest against the use of certain of Foster's songs in the public



schools. The agitation reached a climax recently in Boston, where a book of "Forty Best Songs," compiled for school use, was withdrawn by the Boston School Committee because it contained seven songs by Stephen Foster in which occurred the words "nigger," "darky," and "Massa." It was claimed by the protesting negroes that these words were used as epithets and as terms of reproach, and that their children were jeered at unmercifully as a result of singing the songs. The Pastor of the First African M. E. Church of Boston declared that "The songs 'Old Black Joe,' 'My Old Kentucky Home,' and 'Massa's in the Cold, Cold, Ground,' are an insult to the whole colored race." The School Committee agreed to withdraw the book, but their action was severely criticised throughout the country and brought about a discussion of the whole subject of Foster's songs which demonstrated how wide-spread is their popularity and how deep the affection in which they are held.

There may be some cause for complaint against the perpetuation of such a song as "Oh Susanna," in which the negro appears only as a buffoon, a song typifying an attitude toward the negro which has long since died out, but it is difficult to understand how the singing of such songs as "Old Black Joe" and "My Old Kentucky Home" can humiliate the colored race. On the contrary, it would seem that these songs are a distinct tribute to the colored race, being among the permanent contributions to American literature inspired by the negro, comparable to "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "Uncle Remus." Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the negro poet, makes frequent use of the objectionable words. It is impossible to eliminate from history the story of the Civil War, nor should the younger negroes be allowed to grow up in ignorance of the fact that to secure their freedom the white people of the North fought for four years, gave freely of their lives and treasure, and with their hearts' blood won for the negroes the blessings of life, liberty and

the pursuit of happiness. The life of the American people is mirrored in their literature, in which the songs of Foster occupy an exalted and imperishable place.

Stephen Foster touched but one chord in the gamut of human emotions, but he sounded that strain supremely well. His song is of that nostalgia of the soul which is inborn and instinctive to all humanity, a homesickness unaffected by time or space. It is a theme which has always made up a large part of the world's poetry, and will always continue to do so as long as human hearts yearn for love and aspire toward happiness. Among all the poets who have harped the sorrows of Time and Change, no song rings truer than that of Stephen Foster. We have traced, as best we may, the story of his life from a bright happy childhood into the dismal shadows of failure and death. From the unpromising soil in which he grew, he was able to distill by some strange alchemy of the soul such sweet magic of melody as to win an immortality far beyond his dreaming. These wild-flowers of music which blossomed, unwatched and untended, from unsuspected seeds, have found for themselves a spot which is all their own, where they may bloom forever in Fields Elysian.











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